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Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Summary

For several years now, the regional commissions have been reporting to the Economic and Social Council on their efforts to adapt their respective bodies to the needs of the twenty-first century, all in the context of the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields. These efforts acquired a fresh impetus in the last two years, as a result of the renewed momentum that reform had taken on as the Organization approached its fiftieth anniversary. In 1996, both the General Assembly (in its resolution 50/227) and the Council (in its resolution 1996/41) called for reviews of the regional commissions with a view to strengthening and enhancing their effectiveness as action-oriented and policy-oriented bodies. The Council in its resolution 1996/41 also requested the regional commissions to continue undertaking their own reviews and to report on the results to the Council at its substantive session of 1997.

In the past two years, considerable progress has been achieved by all of the commissions, with differences in content, scope and approach between them. A full account of the measures undertaken can be found in the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/1997/40 and Add.1) presented to

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the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997, and in the present addendum to the report of the Secretary-General (E/1998/65) on the same subject, prepared for submission to the council at its substantive session of 1998. Still, this addendum differs from those submitted on previous occasions in several respects. First and foremost, it comes on the heels of the Secretary-General's programme for reform, as presented in document A/51/950 and addenda. It will be recalled that in that document, the Secretary-General recommended that the Council initiate a general review of the regional commissions. The General Assembly endorsed this recommendation in its resolution 52/12B of 19 December 1997, and invited the Council, in consultation with Member States and appropriate intergovernmental regional bodies, to conduct a general review of the regional commissions at its substantive session of 1998, bearing in mind the relevant provisions of Assembly resolution 50/227 and the individual reviews each commission had already carried out, in order to consider the competencies of the regional commissions, taking into account the competencies of global bodies and other regional and subregional intergovernmental bodies, and to submit a report thereon to the Assembly before the end of its fifty-second session. Thus, this addendum to the report of the Secretary-General examines the role of the regional commissions in the broader context of the reform of the United Nations.

In addition to the review of implementation of reform within each of the commissions, this addendum also reviews selected activities implemented during the period between the Council's substantive sessions of 1997 and 1998, including follow-up to recent world conferences.

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I. Reform of the regional commissions

A. Economic Commission for Europe

1. In September 1995, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) undertook an in-depth review of its strategic directions, intergovernmental structure and methods of work. This reform process culminated in the preparation of a Declaration on the Strengthening of Economic Cooperation in Europe[1] and a related Plan of Action[2] which were adopted by ECE at its jubilee session in April 1997 and subsequently endorsed by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1997 (July).

2. The central objective of the reform of ECE was to establish the strategic direction of the Commission and to take measures to increase its efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling its core competencies and functions, which are described below. Basically, the ECE reform process has been conducted in a comprehensive and transparent manner and in full partnership with all member countries of the commission. This process entailed an in-depth review of the programme of work and refocusing of activities on the priority areas of environment, transport, statistics and trade. It also led to a thorough examination of the intergovernmental structure of the commission, and its methods of work, as well as its relations with other bodies, civil society organizations and the business community.

3. The main features of ECE reform were highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General in the economic, social and related fields (E/1997/40 and Add.1) prepared for the substantive session of 1997 of the Economic and Social Council. Since then, the reform has been expeditiously implemented. The number of ECE principal subsidiary bodies (PSBs) has been reduced from 14 to 7, and all of them have streamlined their programme of work through rationalization, consolidation and suppression of obsolete activities in accordance with the Plan of Action. The PSBs have in turn reviewed their related bodies in order to reduce their number and limit them to two categories: working parties of a standing nature and ad hoc groups of experts established for a two-year period with a precise programme of work and sunset clauses. This thereby simplifies the whole intergovernmental structure and makes it more transparent. The bureaux of the PSBs have also been reformed in order to fulfil the objectives assigned to them by the Plan of Action, in particular to increase the efficiency of the annual meetings of the PSBs through a well-focused agenda, preparation of the decisions to be taken and the active monitoring of work performed since the previous session.

4. Changes in the methods of work have also been carried out in order to increase efficiency in the functioning of both the intergovernmental machinery and the secretariat, including a reduction in the duration of meetings, a streamlining of pre-session documents and a shortening of meeting reports.

5. With the support of their bureaux, the PSBs have started to prioritize all their activities. This process, together with the oversight and adjusting mechanism of the programme of work established by the reform, introduces more flexibility and dynamism in programming, by allowing existing activities to be terminated and new ones to be initiated at a pace in keeping with the changing needs and realities of the region.

6. All PSBs also pay particular attention to the incorporation, in their programme of work, of the four cross-sectoral concerns identified in the reform, namely: the outlook for sustainable development, the mainstreaming of the gender-perspective, the special concern for economies in transition and the involvement of the business community. PSBs have also developed intersectoral linkages as demonstrated in the field of transport and environment (see paras. 129-130 on the Vienna Conference).

7. Finally, the structure of the secretariat has been modified and streamlined as a consequence of the new substantive orientations, the institutional changes contained in the Plan of Action and the efficiency gains achieved. Posts within the activities terminated or streamlined have been abolished or redeployed to sectors strengthened in the context of the reform. Further efficiency gains would permit the reallocation of staff so as to respond to new needs and requests which, by way of the mechanism established by the reform, will be reviewed every two years by the Commission.

Core competencies and functions

8. In responding to the specific needs of the region, ECE has two core functions, namely:

(a) In the fields of environment, transport, statistics, trade, industry and enterprise development, sustainable energy, timber and human settlements, the development of common legal instruments, norms, standards or guidelines and the harmonization of policies and practices in order to facilitate harmonious economic relationships among the countries of the region as well as agreed responses to common problems. In future, the acquired capacity of the

Commission to develop norms and standards will enable it to respond fully to changing needs and circumstances in these and other domains of common concern at the pan-European and trans-Atlantic level. For example, the involvement of and partnership with non-governmental organizations and the public, in both the development and implementation of conventions, could be encouraged as has been done recently during the development of the draft convention on access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters;

(b) The production of statistics and analyses in the above-mentioned areas as well as economic and policy analyses covering the whole region with a particular focus on current developments and problems of structural change in countries in transition. This function enables all member countries to share experiences and to have a sound basis for policy formulation, with a view to promoting sustainable development at the country, subregional and regional levels.

9. To enable countries in transition, as well as countries in war-torn areas, to use and fully benefit from the integration tools developed by ECE, the Commission carries out technical assistance activities, directly linked to the above-mentioned functions, mainly in the form of advisory services and demand-driven workshops. They primarily support countries in transition in (a) the implementation of conventions, norms and standards; (b) capacity development; and (c) the improvement of data-collection and dissemination systems.

10. As one of the five "regional arms" of the United Nations, the Commission has two additional core functions:

(a) Bringing the contribution of the ECE region to the global level through inputs into the preparations for and follow-up to global conferences as well as by making ECE's normative instruments known and available to non-ECE members or to the international community as a whole;

(b) Facilitating the implementation of international commitments through, *inter alia*, its catalytic role among United Nations and non-United Nations organizations active in the region regarding the follow-up to global conferences on cross-sectoral issues and through its direct involvement in such follow-up on sectoral issues pertaining to its fields of competence.

11. At its most recent session, held from 20 to 23 April 1998, the Commission underscored the above core functions of ECE and emphasized that its technical cooperation activities, which are limited in scale, are to be undertaken in support of those functions and particularly for the benefit of countries with economies in transition. It also underscored the role of ECE in bringing the contribution of the region to the global level and in facilitating implementation of international commitments at the regional level within its areas of work.

ECE cooperation with other bodies in the field of norms- and standard-setting

12. Norms and standards developed by ECE respond to the specific situation and needs of the region. ECE's role in this domain is well established. The risk of duplication in this field is very low, given that there is a clear division of labour among relevant organizations and that there are mechanisms for mutual exchange of information among regional and subregional organizations, at both the intergovernmental and the secretariat levels. These mechanisms were reinforced by the Plan of Action. For example, ECE is the only forum that develops and adopts region-wide agreements and norms for road, railway, inland water and combined transport, while on its part the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) is the political framework for discussing general directions in this sector. In the field of environment, ECE has a comprehensive agenda on environmental issues while the Council of Europe addresses issues related to pan-European biological and landscape diversity. In areas of both transport and environment, ECE and the European Union (EU) have developed a "two-way dynamics": based on the complementarity of their membership, a number of ECE normative instruments are translated into EU legislation and sometimes the latter is used as a basis for drafting instruments for the whole ECE region. In statistics, the ECE Conference of European Statisticians discusses jointly the work programmes of ECE, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and other organizations.

13. Many ECE norms and standards may meet global needs or those of several countries of other regions. Their extension is realized in a pragmatic way as illustrated by the following examples: (a) the TIR (international road transport) Convention has been adopted by a number of non-ECE member States; (b) the protocol on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) under the ECE convention on air pollution is being used by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which is initiating a global legal instrument in the same area; (c) the Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport (CEFACT), which was created by ECE in order to take up, adapt and extend the set of norms and standards established for trade facilitation, is open to all

United Nations Member States as well as to members of the non-governmental organization and business community.

14. Many of the ECE guidelines aim primarily at supporting countries in transition to build up a market-based legal regulatory framework. These guides relate in particular to promotion of foreign direct investment (FDI), international contract practices, reform of land administration and real estate. ECE exchanges information and cooperates with a number of other relevant regional and global organizations active in the area that have different memberships or different mandates in order to avoid duplication, and to secure complementarity in approaches. In addition, ECE which gathers all the countries of the region on an equal footing, provides the most suitable forum for review and policy dialogue of issues of regional concern, including taking into account the concerns of particular groups of countries, and for harmonizing recommendations.

15. ECE continues to observe the general rule that when organizations are active in the same field and in the same countries they have to maintain a regular dialogue, and when one decides to embark upon the development of an instrument, the rationale for such an undertaking and its consistency with instruments already adopted in other organizations are carefully examined with the organizations concerned. For example, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and ECE have agreed on a division of labour in the areas of trade facilitation, trade efficiency and trade promotion with the International Trade Centre (ITC) and are discussing their approaches for transit transport.

ECE cooperation with other bodies in the field of operational activities

16. The primary objective of operational activities within ECE is to support the core functions of the Commission as presented above. They consist primarily of advisory services, preparation of bankable projects and the organization of workshops. They are undertaken either with individual countries or with groups of countries mainly in cooperation with relevant subregional groupings. Being more political than technical entities, the subregional groupings are increasingly requesting ECE to provide expertise in areas that promote subregional economic integration, such as transport and border-crossing, addressing of common environmental concerns, investment promotion and sustainable energy development. In order to respond consistently to these demands, agreements (in the form of a "memorandum of understanding" or an exchange of letters) have been reached between ECE and the following subregional groupings: the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Inter-State Economic Committee of the Economic Union of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Programmes of cooperation have also been established within the framework of the South East European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) and, recently, in partnership with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

17. All these programmes aim at facilitating good neighbourlike relations and cooperation among participating countries in respect of promoting exchanges of experience as well as greater awareness and effective use of the instruments developed at the intergovernmental level within ECE.

18. So far, most ECE operational activities have been undertaken by the regional advisers with backstopping from regular staff members involved in normative and analytical work. This ensures and strengthens cross-fertilization and mutual reinforcement of the two types of activities. At the same time, stronger cooperation with other interested organizations, including financing institutions, is called for in order to provide better service and to avoid inconsistency in terms of the advice provided.

19. Such cooperation already exists for capacity-building in the national administration of countries in transition. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provides support that enables ECE to assist the statistical offices of these countries in improving the methodology and data collection of demographic and social statistics. Similarly, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and ECE cooperate in assisting countries in the preparation of the population and housing censuses in the 2000 round. Both projects are good examples of cooperation for capacity-building, based on common objectives and complementary assets of the organizations involved. This type of cooperation could be extended to other areas, for example, legal literacy in the environmental field with UNEP; training on human settlements reforms with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat); and capacity-building activities with UNDP in ECE areas of expertise, it being understood that such areas should be explicit components of the national frameworks (country strategy note (CSN) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)) established in countries in transition.

20. Another type of cooperation is developed through regional programmes which include local projects requesting

the involvement of country-based institutions and development banks. An example of this is ECE's Programme on "Energy Efficiency 2000" which is developed with the support of the UNDP/World Bank Global Environment Facility (GEF). It includes projects on energy efficiency demonstration zones located in several countries in transition. Through such cooperation, the financing dimension, the concern for national execution and the need to comply with standards are brought together.

21. More generally, in addition to providing technical and legal expertise, ECE is the regional forum wherein concerned public and private partners can meet and experiences drawn from individual projects can be shared, thereby providing international exposure to local and national teams, and facilitating project replication in other countries.

22. The Plan of Action devotes a full chapter to relations with other bodies. The directions have been and continue to be implemented both by the secretariat and by member countries. Nonetheless, it takes time to create a "culture of cooperation" which can be further achieved through regular exchange of information, mutual recognition of the areas of expertise and undertaking of joint activities as appropriate.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

23. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) undertook three major exercises in recent years for its reform; – in 1987 (see E/1988/69), 1992 (see E/1992/65/Add.1) and 1997 (see E/1997/40 and Add.1). The 1992 review led to the conclusion that the dynamic changes in the Asia-Pacific region argued strongly for an intersectoral, multidisciplinary strategy to meet the region's evolving needs. Consequently, the Commission recommended the adoption of a thematic approach to address the region's development challenges. The 1997 review entailed extensive deliberations by the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives (ACPR), followed by the Regional Preparatory Meeting on the Review of the Conference Structure of the commission, held in Bangkok from 24 to 28 February 1997 (see E/ESCAP/1048). The results of these deliberations were reviewed by the Commission itself, which reconfirmed the thematic approach. That review also emphasized the evolutionary process of the reform, as well as the need for further sharpening of the focus of work of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, thereby improving efficiency and effectiveness in delivery of ESCAP's work programme.

24. In light of the reform of the United Nations at the Headquarters level, in particular the process set in motion through the adoption by the General Assembly of its resolutions 50/227 and 52/12 B further guided the commission in its continuing work on reform and restructuring. The Commission, at its fifty-fourth session, held in Bangkok from 16 to 22 April 1998, considered two documents (E/ESCAP/1083 and 1084) prepared by the secretariat to provide, respectively (a) an overview of the reform and restructuring being carried out, and (b) an examination of the comparative advantage of ESCAP.

25. The reforms undertaken by ESCAP resulted in the reduction of the number of components of the Commission's subsidiary structure from nine to seven, with the structure comprising three thematic committees (on regional economic cooperation; socio-economic measures to alleviate poverty in rural and urban areas; environment and natural resources development), two technical committees (on transport, communications, tourism and infrastructure development; and statistics) and two special bodies (on least developed and landlocked developing countries; and Pacific island developing countries). All except the committees on poverty alleviation, environment and transport will meet biennially. To correspond to the new intergovernmental structure, in the context of the revision to the medium-term plan, 1998-2001, a revised programme structure is also being established in two phases, comprising seven subprogrammes (originally reduced from 15 to 10 and then to 7). Furthermore, to ensure congruence between the programme and the secretariat structures, the secretariat is also undergoing reorganization, to be implemented in two phases as well during 1998-1999, entailing reduction of the number of substantive divisions to seven. This will fulfil a major recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat.

26. The series of above reviews reconfirmed time and again that the Commission itself should meet annually. However, over the years its duration has been reduced from 10 days to 6 days. Moreover, in order to enhance its effectiveness under the new arrangement, the ministerial segment of the Commission is to be preceded by a senior officials segment, each for a duration of three days. Recommendations have also been made for organizing informal meetings of the heads of delegations as well as panel discussions on important special issues. Furthermore, the limit on the number of intergovernmental meetings (other than committee sessions), to be held with prior approval of the Commission, has been reduced from 15 meetings to 5 meetings per year, with their total duration reduced from 100 days to 25 days per calendar year.

27. At the same time, various other efficiency initiatives already under way within the ESCAP secretariat (covering management, information systems and internal reporting; documentation and publications; conference services; general services; utilities and communications; staff training; and staff travel) will continue to be vigorously pursued. The fifty-fourth session of the Commission welcomed the revival of the ESCAP Publications Committee, which would serve to control the quality and quantity of publications under the regular budget with a view to redeploying some resources to training and technical assistance activities.

28. These measures have enabled the secretariat to perform its function, including the need to provide assistance to the new members from Central Asia, and to comply with the directives of the Commission with a number of staff reduced from 515 to 468 and a budget from US$ 67.5 million in the biennium 1996/1997 to US$ 56.2 million in the biennium 1998/1999.

Core competencies

29. To take stock of the reform efforts undertaken so far, the Commission considered at its fifty-fourth session a secretariat study on review and reform (E/ESCAP/1084) and examined the core competencies (that is to say, the comparative advantage) and functions of ESCAP in the context of the region's economic and social development, the relations between ESCAP and its development partners, and the challenges facing the organization including its role and relevance into the twenty-first century. It found that the basis for the Commission's core competencies lies in its role as the only region-wide intergovernmental policy forum, as well as in its functions of regional standard- and goal-setting, monitoring and analysis of economic and social trends, regional data collection and development information dissemination, and regional follow-up to the global United Nations conferences. In terms of operational dimension, its role includes the delivery of catalytic projects, transfer of experience and best practices, cross-border projects, technical cooperation among developing countries and regional technical advisory services.

30. The Commission noted that ESCAP had been engaged in the reform exercise over a considerable period of time. Those reform efforts needed to be pursued in the broader context of economic and social developments in the region and the Commission's ability to respond, in an adequate and timely manner, to emerging problems. In keeping with the times, ESCAP needed to continue adjusting itself to changing circumstances and conditions to ensure that it remained relevant and responsive to the needs of the membership. The Commission emphasized the need to devise clearer objectives for the activities of ESCAP and to set time-frames to achieve those objectives. The regular monitoring and impact assessment capabilities of ESCAP needed to be strengthened. In addition, the results of the questionnaire on priorities and resource allocation should be reflected in the programme planning and budgeting process as soon as possible. The Commission recommended that the activities and services offered by ESCAP, and its success stories, be made more widely known, by both the secretariat and member Governments.

31. In considering operational activities, the Commission emphasized the need to continue forging strategic alliances between ESCAP and other United Nations bodies and agencies, as well as other relevant organizations in the region. It emphasized that resources, including regular budget resources, should be directed more to operational activities than to meetings and publications. It urged that members and associate members that had not yet done so should, in order to define more clearly the Commission's work programme priorities, complete the questionnaire on resources allocation that had been circulated by the secretariat in February 1997. This was considered especially important in view of the current decline in extrabudgetary funding, which had in the past been a major source of support for the Commission's operational activities. It was suggested that non-governmental organizations should be given more opportunities to participate in the Commission's technical assistance projects.

32. For the Commission, achieving the objectives of rationalizing, streamlining and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of its work so as to enable it to better tackle the complex development issues faced by the countries of the region is a continuing task. In its discussion of ESCAP's continuing reform efforts, the Commission at its fifty-fourth session identified the following activities for further action: (a) to rationalize its work programme based upon its core competencies; (b) to further strengthen project monitoring and self-evaluation of both ongoing and completed projects on a systematic basis; (c) to further reduce the percentage of resources devoted to programme support activities; (d) within the work programme, to redeploy resources from meetings and publications to technical assistance activities; and (e) to implement promptly the recommendations of the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat.

33. In that connection, it may be recalled that in its resolution 53/1 entitled "Restructuring the conference structure of the Commission",[3] adopted by ESCAP at its fifty-third session held in April 1997, ESCAP, *inter alia*,

provided the Advisory Committee of Permanent Representatives with the functions to assist the Executive Secretary in drawing up proposals for the medium-term plan, the programme budget and the work programme priorities and resource allocation, consistent with the guidelines provided by the Commission, and to monitor and evaluate the implementation, outcome and effectiveness of the Commission's programme of work.[4] At its recent fifty-fourth session, the Commission recognized that ACPR was a unique and productive forum within the United Nations system and served as an important link between representatives of members and associate members and the secretariat. The Commission reiterated that an important function of ACPR was its overseeing and monitoring role and, in that regard, urged the secretariat to strengthen the constructive and cooperative relationship already established between ACPR and the secretariat, in particular with respect to the resource allocations and monitoring of expenditures. The Commission also acknowledged that ACPR played an important role in advising the secretariat in its efforts to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of programme delivery within the wider reform being undertaken by the United Nations system.[5]

34. The Commission at its fifty-fourth session emphasized that it would be useful for its views on ESCAP's reform to be brought to the attention of the Economic and Social Council. It therefore agreed that the chairman of the Commission would be invited to transmit to the Secretary-General and the President of the Economic and Social Council a letter detailing the views and concerns of the Commission on the subject.[6]

Regional coordination

35. ESCAP also performs a role in fostering regional-level coordination and enhancing synergy through the Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP), for which it serves as the convener and provides secretariat support. Some of the 13 subcommittees of RICAP are actively promoting joint programming as well as funding for joint projects. Some of them also include subregional groupings, non-governmental organizations and civic society organizations as members. The fifty-fourth session of the Commission, in its resolution 54/2, entitled "Manila Declaration on Accelerated Implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region", *inter alia*, recommended the establishment of another RICAP subcommittee on the regional social development agenda.

36. At its fifty-fourth session, the Commission also voiced strong support for the mandate of ESCAP as "team leader" for the United Nations system in the economic and social fields in Asia and the Pacific. Particular value was accorded to the role of RICAP in avoiding unnecessary duplication and in increasing the synergy and complementarity among the programmes of work of the respective entities. It was also pointed out that coordination should extend beyond the United Nations system to include other regional and subregional organizations, in order to achieve optimal use of existing resources.

Relation with subregional organizations

37. ESCAP provides substantive support to the subregional organizations through its analytical work and project-based assistance, at their request. Since 1994, it has convened an annual consultative meeting of the region's subregional organizations, for which it serves also as the secretariat. The first meeting in 1994 identified trade and investment, transport and communication, energy and human resources development as priority areas for inter-subregional cooperation. In 1997, it facilitated the establishment of yet another economic cooperation grouping, BIMST-EC, involving Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and assisted it in considering the opportunities for economic cooperation in nine major areas. In North-East Asia, ESCAP has brought together senior officials from China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation to discuss issues ranging from trade to transport and infrastructure development and environment. ESCAP's cooperation with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is undertaken within the framework of the memoranda of understanding (MOUs) established with those organizations, respectively, in 1993 and 1994. A similar MOU was also signed with the Asian Development Bank in 1993. The ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre (ESCAP-POC), based in Vanuatu, undertakes substantive collaboration with the South Pacific Forum secretariat, the South Pacific Commission and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. Cooperation with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is based on specific requests. In 1997, ESCAP and the ASEAN secretariat organized a joint event entitled "Joint Seminar on Trade and Investment Cooperation in South-East Asia: Opportunities and Challenges Toward ASEAN 10 and Beyond", focusing on the accession of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar to ASEAN. The seminar was held in Jakarta from 19 to 21 February 1997.

38. Relevant regional/subregional non-governmental organizations and civic groups from within the region as

well as technical intergovernmental bodies, such as Asia Pacific Telecommunity, Centre for Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific, International Pepper Community, Typhoon Committee, Mekong River Commission and so on, actively participate in the meetings of the Commission and its subsidiary committees. In particular, their contributions have been noteworthy in the regional ministerial meetings organized by the Commission in recent years both in preparation for and follow-up of the global conferences in the fields of environment, social development, women, population and human settlement. With some of them, such as Colombo Plan Bureau, Regional Network of Local Authorities for the Management of Human Settlements and the Asian Institute of Transport Development, ESCAP maintains structured cooperation through MOUs or exchange of letters. Participation of all these organizations, representing diverse, cross-sectoral interests of the region, in ESCAP's meetings and activities helps avoid duplication and contribute to the attainment of greater synergy. Currently, non-governmental organization involvement is prominent in the implementation of the Asia Pacific Decade for Disabled Persons. Cooperation with the private sector is pursued through a network of the region's chambers of commerce; and creating an environment for private sector participation in infrastructure development features prominently in the work of the Committee on Transport, Communications, Tourism and Infrastructure Development.

C. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

39. Since the early 1990s, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has made an intensive effort of updating its substantive "message" to meet the development challenges of the future, and of adapting the organization to the rapidly changing circumstances in Latin America and the Caribbean. These efforts are reflected, *inter alia*:

(a) In the substantive realm, in the series of flagship documents that the organization has been publishing yearly, under the banner of "changing production patterns and social equity", which have offered a useful framework for the more detailed development issues explored through the secretariat's analytical work;[7]

(b) In the institutional realm, in clarifying ECLAC's mission statement, in seeking a closer interaction with its member Governments, and in adopting internal reforms of the secretariat and the intergovernmental machinery so as to rationalize the use of resources, to streamline the secretariat and to adopt efficiency measures, and in seeking closer collaboration with other United Nations and non-United Nations intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. A brief description of these measures adopted through 1997 is available in a separate document (see LC/G.1962). New resolutions were adopted by the Commission at its recent twenty-seventh session (Aruba, 11-16 May 1998) which only tend to consolidate the trend of the past years. Thus, a new resolution, on the reform of the United Nations and its impact on ECLAC was approved; it is fully consistent with the measures adopted thus far.

Mission statement and core activities

40. During the Commission's twenty-sixth session, celebrated in San José, Costa Rica, in April 1996, a revised mission statement was adopted. The relevant resolution (553(XXVI)) defines ECLAC as a centre of excellence charged with collaborating with member States in a comprehensive analysis of development processes geared to the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies and the resulting provision of operational services in the fields of specialized information, advisory services, training and support for regional and international cooperation and coordination.[8]

41. As can be gathered from this mission statement, ECLAC's core activities represent a blend of analytical or normative work (research; information-gathering, interpretation and dissemination; monitoring of economic events) with operational activities (especially technical assistance) and an advocacy role (exercised in part through the power of convening seminars and meetings). The organization has set high standards for its work (hence, the term "centre of excellence") which very much relies on drawing from national experiences. This, in turn, explains the capital importance the secretariat places on seeking a close relation with member Governments as well as non-governmental actors in the Latin American and Caribbean societies.

42. Perhaps the most important aspect of updating in the mission statement refers not to the functions of ECLAC – the institution has always carried out a mix of analytical and operational activities – but to the specific content of said activities. In selecting these activities, the double criterion of relevance and uniqueness is sought; in other words, an important effort is made to avoid duplication of the work being undertaken by other regional or global organizations, and topics selected for examination must meet the test of being significant as development issues.

Institutional reform

43. At the same time that an updating in ECLAC's development thinking was taking place, numerous actions have been taken within the secretariat to improve ECLAC's effectiveness and efficiency. The Commission's internal structure was streamlined and the number of divisions was reduced from 19 to 12 by merging subprogrammes and related functions. At the same time, productivity was significantly raised as a result of the introduction of computer technologies. An extraordinary example of the savings achieved as a result of new technologies is to be found in the area of editorial and distribution services.

44. Progress has also been achieved in the area of performance indicators. Although the analytical work of the Commission is resistant to a precise assessment of the volume and quality of outputs generated, and still more resistant to an analysis of the potential impact of such outputs, a task force has been set up, headed by a division chief, to develop a performance measurement system for the substantive work of ECLAC. Among other aspects, periodic questionnaires are sent out to the most obvious potential users of ECLAC's outputs to inquire about their relevance and usefulness. The system measures the degree to which activities are achieving their objectives as defined under each subprogramme.

45. One major step forward in the efforts to achieve greater relevance, effectiveness and efficiency was the design of a conceptual framework for adapting ECLAC to changing circumstances, within the United Nations and in Latin America and the Caribbean. This framework was outlined in the secretariat report entitled "Reform of the United Nations and its impact on ECLAC". The document, which was conceived as an "issues paper", was presented to the twenty-sixth session of the Commission, and gave rise to ECLAC resolution 553(XXVI), which sets forth the most far-reaching formal statement in recent times by the Commission on the role and functions of ECLAC. As already stated, during the recently held twenty-seventh session, a new resolution was adopted, building on resolution 553(XXVI), consolidating the progress achieved, and signalling new directions for further progress.

Relevance of programme of work and priority-setting

46. With regard to the interaction between the secretariat and the member States, ECLAC resolution 553(XXVI) established an ad hoc working group open to all ECLAC member countries and headed by the Chairman of the Commission, which, in consultation with the Executive Secretary, is empowered to define priorities for the work programme and recommend to the Commission strategic directions for its future activities, taking into account the development priorities of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as budgetary considerations.

47. Since its establishment, the group has met on three occasions, and representatives from 40 member States and three associate members have taken part. At the first meeting (29-31 July 1996) all the elements of the ECLAC work programme for the biennium 1998-1999 were thoroughly analysed and assigned a relative priority.

48. The second and third meetings (5 June and 12 November 1997) were devoted to reviewing the reforms adopted within the framework of a decentralized management scheme for which ECLAC was selected by the Secretary-General. To that end, the secretariat presented three notes entitled "Review of recent reforms adopted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean" (LC/G.1962), "Management pilot scheme" (LC/G.1964) and "Progress in the implementation of the pilot management scheme" (LC/G.1983).

49. The accomplishments of the ad hoc working group have laid the foundation for a new form of interaction between the Commission's member countries and the secretariat in priority-setting as well as in discussion of the "strategic directions" for the institution. As a consequence, the work programme appears more focused and responsive to the expectations of member States. During the twenty-seventh session of ECLAC, member Governments once more approved the work programme for the biennium 2000-2001, and delegated to the ad hoc working group the setting of priorities of the programme elements contained in the aforementioned document.

ECLAC and the organizations of the United Nations

50. ECLAC has a long tradition of cooperation, with virtually all of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system that are active in the region. This cooperation has evolved within the existing regional and institutional context but its principal source of synergy continues to be the blending of the Commission's analytical capabilities with the operational experience gained by these institutions. In recent years, the level of funding of joint activities has declined (while bilateral contributions have increased), but coordination and cooperation between ECLAC and the development programmes of the United Nations has nevertheless been maintained. Still, the potential for duplication or overlapping

exists, especially between the activities of ECLAC and those included in UNDP's regional programme. Numerous efforts have been made by senior officials of both bodies to work more closely, but there is still room for improvement in this regard.

51. The links that ECLAC has nurtured with the organizations of the United Nations system are based on complementarity of the individual organization's objectives and their comparative advantages. Generally speaking, the Commission has contributed its multidisciplinary perspective on the issues under consideration, its database and its institutional position on macroeconomic and social issues, while the agencies have contributed their sectorally oriented and specialized knowledge. The complementarity of their areas of expertise has also enhanced the joint ability of the Commission and of the various organizations of the United Nations system to secure the participation of prominent experts in the intergovernmental meetings and seminars that they organize.

52. Another area in which there has been coordination and collaboration between ECLAC and other United Nations and regional bodies has been the preparatory work leading up to the international conferences convened by the Organization and the follow-up to the agreements adopted at those meetings. For example, in its capacity as a forum for region-wide consensus-building, ECLAC played an essential role in supporting the Governments' efforts to formulate joint proposals in preparation for the World Summit for Social Development, the International Conference on Population and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

53. Finally, consultations and sometimes joint activities (mostly, seminars) have been undertaken with the Bretton Woods institutions.

ECLAC and regional institutions

54. ECLAC has made a systematic effort to work closely with regional and subregional institutions to avoid, as much as possible, duplication or overlapping in work programmes. At the minimum, periodic meetings are held with officials of those organizations to confront the issue of work programmes, exchange information and, often, reach collaborative agreements. At best, joint activities have been carried out, or, as happens with subregional secretariats of economic integration movements, ECLAC works through these subregional secretariats.

55. ECLAC has maintained close institutional relations in the field of cooperation with the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Latin American Economic System (SELA), the Central American Integration System, the Caribbean Community and the Latin American Integration System (ALADI). Special mention should be made of a broad agreement that was signed with IDB in April 1996, which has opened the way for exploring possible joint studies and programmes in a number of areas. ECLAC also works jointly with OAS and IDB, in a tripartite agreement, to further western hemispheric integration. This arrangement was ratified and enhanced at the Second Summit of the Americas, held in Santiago, Chile, in April 1998.

56. The context within which the Commission functions has changed significantly in recent decades with the creation of a large number of national, subregional and regional entities that pursue activities of a similar nature. ECLAC remains in a unique position, however, since it is still the only institution that is devoted to a systematic analysis, from a regional perspective, of issues having a bearing on the development of all the Latin American and Caribbean countries and that combines its work in that area with the provision of technical cooperation services and activities in support of regional and subregional international cooperation.

57. ECLAC is committed to strengthening intraregional cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean. The region has a strong tradition of cooperation at this level, and the process is now gaining even greater momentum. In addition to serving as a sounding board and as a catalyst for debate on a wide range of development issues, ECLAC has furnished technical services to the secretariats of regional and subregional integration mechanisms, has fostered technical cooperation among developing countries, has served as a liaison with global forums and has facilitated the region's participation therein.

ECLAC and the non-governmental sector

58. Although in the past ECLAC's counterparts have been mostly official institutions, particularly in the economic sector, ECLAC has strengthened its relationship with the non-governmental organization sector, in order to receive inputs for research orientation and analysis of the region, and to reach, through them, a wider audience or partners at the grass-roots level.

59. ECLAC capitalized on the participatory impetus provided by the preparatory process for the recent United Nations world conferences and is presently engaged in maintaining these levels of participation in the follow-up activities. As one of the preparatory activities for the first meeting in follow-up to the World Summit for Social

Development (São Paulo, Brazil, 6-9 April 1997), ECLAC sponsored and took part in a regional meeting of non-governmental organizations organized by the International Council for Social Welfare. Likewise, more than 80 non-governmental organizations participated in preparatory activities for the seventh session of ECLAC's Regional Conference on the Integration of Women in Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (Santiago, Chile, 19-21 November).

60. In addition, ECLAC has made substantive contributions to numerous activities organized by non-governmental organizations throughout the region, such as the Regional Office of Consumers International, the Latin American Confederation of the Young Men's Christian Associations, the Brazilian Bar Association, the South American Commission for Peace and Security and the Latin American Council for Social Sciences (CLACSO), among others. ECLAC also regularly contributes articles to regional publications, such as *Social Development Review* edited by the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and *Security Dialogue* edited by the World Commission for Peace and Security.

D. Economic Commission for Africa

61. Prior to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 52/12 B, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) had undertaken extensive reforms so as to strengthen and to make more effective the Commission's contribution to the political, social and economic renewal taking place in Africa, as well as to respond to the mandate of Assembly resolution 50/227. Extensive consultations were held on the new strategic directions of the Commission with various stakeholders, including African Governments, high-level African experts, regional and subregional organizations, the private sector and civil society, the Commission's principal partners (representatives of United Nations agencies, bilateral donors and private international foundations), culminating in their endorsement of the new strategic directions for ECA by the Conference of African Ministers for Economic and Social Development and Planning at its annual session in May 1996.

62. The reforms implemented by ECA encompassed three dimensions: programmes- and priority-setting, institutional and organizational restructuring, including the restructuring of the Commission's intergovernmental machinery, and managerial strengthening. The new programme structure focuses on the following themes: facilitating economic and social policy analysis; ensuring food security and sustainable development; strengthening development management; harnessing information and communications for development; and promoting regional cooperation and integration. Two themes – capacity-building and promoting women in development – were considered to be cross-cutting and are therefore mainstreamed across the five thematic subprogrammes.

63. Organizational restructuring focused on streamlining and strengthening programme planning, budgeting, financial control, monitoring and evaluation; the building of a team-based human resources and systems management function; and improved management of physical facilities, procurement and general services. Attention was also given to the establishment of a more effective internal and external communications strategy. This entailed a new publications programme and dissemination strategy, electronic networks, and increased use of computers, e-mail and the Internet. Managerial strengthening has involved moving ECA from a hierarchical, output-oriented structure to a flat, flexible, team-based, results-oriented structure; decentralization of resources and decision-making (to the extent permitted under United Nations budgetary rules), in return for greater accountability for results; and increased emphasis on staff training for skills upgrading and to engender a culture of teamwork.

64. Institutional restructuring has involved the transformation of the multinational programming and operational centres (MULPOCs) into subregional development centres (SRDCs), and strengthening these centres, in terms of human and financial resources. The goal is to redeploy 25 per cent of the Commission's resources to SRDCs by the end of 1998. The Commission has also streamlined its intergovernmental machinery, eliminating overlapping bodies that deal with related issues, thus promoting greater coherence and coordination within the intergovernmental machinery. This has resulted in fewer subsidiary bodies and a reduced number of meetings, saving the time and travel costs of national decision makers, strengthening the quality of decisions and programme directives, and releasing resources for substantive activities.

65. The early outcome of ECA's renewal, reorientation and restructuring process has been a more focused and selective approach in its work programme and clearer responsibilities for programme managers. The results expected by the end of the current biennium are a marked increase in efficiency and timeliness, measurable impacts, and a higher rating of ECA products by member States, partners and other clients. The long-term objective of this renewal is a better-purposed and stronger ECA, more effective in its partnership with

other organizations, and playing an enhanced role in the development of Africa.

ECA's core competencies

66. The competencies and functions of ECA, as a regional commission, can be classified by the following categories, namely: advocacy and policy analysis; data and information dissemination; convening stakeholders and building consensus; technical cooperation; and norms- or standards-setting. ECA has contributed to fostering economic and social development in Africa through its works in these main areas. The review of ECA's relationships vis-à-vis the global entities, regional and subregional organizations centred around the core functions of norm-setting and technical cooperation, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on renewing the United Nations: a programme of reform (A/51/950 and addenda).

ECA's collaboration with global and regional organizations in norm-setting

67. ECA's work in the area of norm-setting is closely related to its analytical and advocacy work, especially in the area of regional cooperation. Regional cooperation and economic integration call for standards and norms to be set for intraregional free flow of production factors, and goods and services. This involves the convergence and harmonization of trade, investment, micro- and macroeconomic policy and the standardization of instruments and management practices among countries. It also requires liberalization and harmonization of cross-border transport regulations, including road and safety standards.

68. ECA's work in norm-setting is linked to fostering regional cooperation and integration; and there is no duplication with the activities of the global entities, as none work in this area. The United Nations Transport and Communications Decades in Africa have provided ECA with a vehicle for fostering infrastructural development, and developing norms on road transport safety as well as for collaboration among some agencies of the United Nations. The collaboration between ECA and UNDP in the area of regional integration focuses on supporting the administrative and technical process of establishing the African Economic Community (AEC). Similarly, the collaboration between ECA and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), in the context of the joint secretariat established by the OAU Summit, centres on supporting the establishment of AEC. This collaboration has entailed the preparation of the protocols for the Abuja Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (A/46/651, annex). Both have fielded joint missions to assess the requirements for strengthening the regional economic communities, which, according to the 1991 Treaty, will serve as the building blocks of AEC.

69. The collaboration between ECA and the subregional organizations has encompassed three areas. First, ECA was instrumental in the establishment of many of these organizations. Second, ECA has developed an extensive programme of collaboration through its subregional development centres for assisting the subregional organizations, including issues of norm-setting. Third, ECA has provided technical assistance in capacity-building to strengthen the effectiveness and functioning of these institutions.

ECA's collaboration with global and regional organizations in technical cooperation

70. Technical cooperation is the main vehicle by which the Commission assists member States in implementing their development policies and objectives. If one conceives of the Commission's advocacy role as prescriptive, then its technical cooperation function involves supporting member States to implement their established priorities and programmes of development. ECA's technical cooperation, by definition, does not involve disbursement of resources. It takes the form of short-term advisory services rendered to member States and their intergovernmental organizations at their request and demand-driven workshops, seminars and fellowships; institution-building; and field projects. Advisory services are provided by a team of regional advisers who are deployed in the various substantive divisions of the Commission and are currently the principal vehicle for the delivery of expert support at the country level. As the resources provided to the Commission for advisory services have increased, so has the scope of the services rendered to member States. The Commission organizes over 40 group training workshops and seminars every year to increase and improve skilled manpower capacity.

71. ECA has also been involved in institution-building, as part of its technical cooperation activities, in such fields as science and technology, banking and finance, minerals and remote sensing, and planning and management. There are at present a total of 30 such ECA-sponsored technical institutions. ECA also has field projects supported by funding partners on the basis of established project documents that the Commission executes for the benefit of its member States.

Other collaborative arrangements

72. ECA has developed extensive collaborative relationships with the various global entities, regional and subregional organizations involved in economic and social development in Africa. The collaboration with these organizations encompasses various facets of development and extends well beyond norm-setting and technical cooperation activities. Thus, for example, under collaborative arrangements with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Bank has pledged a financial contribution of $1 million to ECA's Leadership Fund for Women. ECA and the Bank are also collaborating on research issues of population, food security, environment and infrastructure development, and are jointly undertaking a comprehensive African household survey database. In addition, ECA and the Bank's Economic Development Institute are forging a strong collaboration on training and capacity-building through seminars and workshops on poverty analysis, gender advocacy and knowledge management. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has indicated interest in helping ECA strengthen its capacities in policy analysis, research and data processing, and the collection of fiscal, monetary and balance-of-payment statistics. These efforts would be facilitated through training at the IMF Institute and through visitor programmes at IMF for ECA staff.

73. ECA expects to collaborate with UNFPA, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and UNEP to integrate and bring the nexus issues of food security, population and the environment to the forefront of regional and national planning. With the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Commission plans to collaborate in the collection and analyses of social and economic data as a tool for monitoring poverty, particularly as it pertains to the socio-economic situation of African children. In the post-Uruguay Round of trade liberalization, Africa faces the challenge of becoming an integral part of the world economy through trade, investment, industrial development and a balanced relationship with transnational corporations. ECA will collaborate closely with UNCTAD and the World Trade Organization to assist African countries in developing and adopting policies to increase regional and external trade, with emphasis on viable strategies for diversifying export products and markets. ECA has signed a memorandum of understanding on collaboration with UNCTAD. The Commission and the International Labour Organization (ILO), who share responsibilities as lead United Nations agencies in poverty reduction for the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, will collaborate to promote informal sector and employment-generating strategies. ECA and the World Health Organization (WHO) will work together by putting forward fiscal policies that benefit health sector development in Africa. They will also strengthen past collaboration in raising awareness about the socio-economic impacts of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). The Commission and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will cooperate by utilizing information technology for development, promoting basic education, building the capacities of civil society to ensure good governance, and promoting science and technology exchanges, including South-South cooperation. The Commission's work with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) will centre on private sector and industrial development, as well as on devising programmes at the regional level to strengthen the capacities of member States for trade negotiation and development.

74. In conclusion, the main characteristics of the cooperation between ECA and the United Nations agencies have been based on the fact that they draw on the strengths of each other's organizations; and have sought to avoid duplication of related activities and ensure complementarity.

75. At its recent meeting on 23 and 24 April 1998, the Ministerial Follow-up Committee of the Conference of Ministers responsible for economic and social development and planning considered document E/ECA/MFC.½ entitled, "Reform of the regional commissions: relations between ECA, United Nations agencies, regional and subregional organizations in Africa: a note by the Secretariat". Its deliberations of this item covered a number of points such as the need to strengthen coordination among United Nations agencies operating in Africa, as well as between them and African intergovernmental organizations at the regional and subregional levels; the need to take African priorities and specific circumstances fully into account in the ongoing review of the regional commissions; the recognition that Africa's development problems are, in part, due to endogenous factors and that reform measures should address Africa's own responsibilities; and the role of ECA's SRDCs in strengthening the performance of the United Nations system in Africa at the subregional level.

76. The Follow-up Committee emphasized the need to strengthen inter-agency and inter-organizational coordination at the national, subregional and regional levels in Africa. In considering what form a strengthened United Nations inter-agency coordination might take at the regional and subregional levels, the Committee observed that the national resident coordinator system was still far from functioning as intended. It was proposed, therefore, that

much greater consideration needed to be given to an appropriate holistic model for strengthening inter-agency coordination under African conditions, and that this should also look at coordination arrangements at the regional and subregional levels and the interplay between the three levels of coordination – at the regional, subregional and national levels.

77. With regard to strengthening coordination at the regional level, the Committee expressed strong support for the operationalization in Africa of the regional version of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (regional ACC), chaired by ECA. It was observed that proposals to this effect had been presented by the Secretary-General in 1994. It was further observed that such regional arrangements had been established in other regions.

78. The Committee emphasized that the Economic and Social Council review of the regional commissions and the reform of United Nations activities in Africa should take into account Africa's specific circumstances, constraints and development needs in the context of globalization and Africa's continuing sense of marginalization. In this regard, the consensus of the Committee was that the role of ECA in providing various forms of assistance for addressing these problems to African States individually as well as collectively at the regional and subregional levels continued to be as important as ever. The Committee noted that, prior to undertaking wide-ranging programmatic and institutional reforms in 1995, the Commission had carried out a review of Africa's strategic development objectives and priorities at the threshold of the twenty-first century. It was also noted that the Commission is in the process of consulting member States and leading subregional intergovernmental organizations with a view to identifying specific subregional development priorities in each of Africa's five subregions. The Committee observed that member States wished to exercise greater ownership over the operational activities of the agencies of the United Nations system, including those of the specialized agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization.

79. The Committee placed considerable emphasis on the primary role that should be played by ECA's SRDCs in strengthening the coordination and overall performance of the United Nations system in Africa. It was observed that the Conference of Ministers had directed that the SRDCs be strengthened by transferring substantial resources to them and by broadening their mandate to include their serving as facilitators of the integration activities of the United Nations system operating within the subregions. The Committee noted that the Commission was on track in implementing the decisions of the Conference of Ministers on strengthening the SRDCs. These centres therefore had the capacity to provide effective coordination and team leadership for United Nations operational activities at the subregional level.

E. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

80. The reform of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), which entailed programming changes and structural reorganization, was initiated in 1994 and continues to be undertaken in 1998 as appropriate. ESCWA reported to the nineteenth session of ESCWA, held in Beirut, 7 and 8 May 1997, on all action taken up to that point (document E/ESCWA/19/5). The positive response of ESCWA member States was clearly stated in Commission resolution 216 (XIX) entitled "Organizational and programme changes and modifications introduced by ESCWA since 1994" (E/1997/39, chap. I), which was adopted by the Economic and Social Council in 1997 (Council resolution 1997/14).

81. The reform of ESCWA included immediate and long-term actions. Immediate measures included reducing the number of subprogrammes from 10 to 5, and adjusting the organizational structure accordingly. This also led to a progressive decrease of activities which became more focused on areas in which ESCWA has a comparative advantage and which reflect the realities of the region, thus allocating resources to the priority areas for the Commission. It further linked more clearly the normative and the operational work. To strengthen relations with its member States and to serve them better, a limited number of intergovernmental bodies were established to ensure a more dynamic involvement of member States in priority-setting and in discussions of the direction of ESCWA. Within the secretariat, due attention was given to management reform, including ensuring changes in staff profile and/or skills as relevant to the work programme. Technological advancement and capacity-building and establishing internal mechanisms to support substantive activities were undertaken.

82. The longer-term reform, which has been ongoing, deals with fine-tuning ESCWA's relationship with other regional organizations based on ESCWA's neutrality as an international organization and addressing the geo-economic problems of the region within the context of an environment of globalization. ESCWA's role of coordinating United Nations activities at the regional level through the Regional Interagency Coordination Committee was strengthened by

adopting a regional integrated follow-up action to the global conferences. Relations with non-United Nations regional and subregional organizations, particularly the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), have been further improved; however, they still require additional attention.

Core competencies and functions

83. Throughout its reform process, ESCWA kept in view the five areas of core functions that it had identified for itself: (a) information/data collection, verification and dissemination; (b) policy formulation and analysis; (c) intergovernmental forums; (d) technical support; and (e) coordination at the regional level.

84. ESCWA is gaining status as the principal source of regional statistical data and information in the social and economic fields. Its work in this area allows member States to share information on the basis of standardized definitions and methodologies and to undertake sound analysis of comparative data and information.

85. Regional issues and selected country-specific problems are addressed through analytical work and policy analysis. ESCWA has identified a set of priority areas that are of direct relevance to most member States individually and to all of them collectively. These are water, transport, energy, communication networks, trade, social development and statistics, within a changing regional and global context. In addressing these priority areas, ESCWA has adopted a multisectoral-multi-country (transboundary) approach, as well as an advocacy function.

86. ESCWA also provides an intergovernmental forum, which acts as a source of legislative authority giving programming directives, adopting regional plans of actions, conventions and norms, and advocating the implementation of regional and subregional activities.

87. Through its technical assistance activities, ESCWA ensures synergy between its normative and its operational work. Advisory services and capacity-building provide support to the member States which benefit by the linkage between the normative and the operational. Though technical assistance responds sometimes to specific and immediate needs of member States, it is set within a regional context for development and helps develop the capacity of member States to network among themselves so as to learn from various national experiences.

88. ESCWA promotes coherence of social and economic policies among the member States with the main objective of standard setting and harmonization, exchange of experience and lessons learned. Owing to its position as the natural link in the global- to country-level continuum, ESCWA is the institution best equipped to bring the global principles and recommendations to the regional level and to transmit the regional perspective to the global debate, as has been clearly demonstrated by the follow-up to global conferences.

89. ESCWA is also responsible for coordinating selected activities among United Nations and non-United Nations organizations active in the region, based on its comparative advantage and its multidisciplinary approach. The normative and operational activities of ESCWA for the follow-up to global conferences and those for the participation of ESCWA member States in the World Trade Organization are built on joint activities between ESCWA and United Nations and non-United Nations organizations (for example, the League of Arab States) operating in the region.

ESCWA cooperation with other bodies

90. In enhancing its cooperation with other bodies, ESCWA extends itself to the other United Nations agencies operating in the region. A special example is its role as the coordinator of the Regional Inter-agency Coordination Group (RICG). Though this forum was initially used for exchange of experience, it has developed into one advocating joint activities, the first of which is the project proposal on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences, which is being reviewed by UNDP as its flagship project with ESCWA. Joint action was also taken by the Regional Gender Task Force to provide support to the League of Arab States meeting on follow-up to the Beijing Conference. In addition, ESCWA works towards establishing institutional relationships with the other bodies operating in the region. Besides RICG, ESCWA has signed a number of memoranda of understanding or letters of understanding with various specialized United Nations and non-United Nations agencies, which define the nature of the bilateral cooperation between ESCWA and the agencies concerned. Examples of the organizations concerned include FAO Regional Office for Arab Countries and UNCTAD; the League of Arab States; the Arab Labour Organization; the Arab Planning Institute; the Centre for Environment and Development for Arab States and Europe (CEDARE); and the International Centre for Arid and Dry Areas (ICARDA), just to name a few.

91. At the operational activities level, ESCWA continues to work closely with UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), UNFPA, the League of Arab States and the Arab Gulf Programme for

United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) in such areas as human development, gender mainstreaming, eradication of poverty and human settlements. ESCWA plays the coordinating role among these various bodies, and the division of labour is clearly delineated. In terms of the United Nations bodies, ESCWA is the only forum for adopting regional positions and plans of action on an integrated vision of social development. Furthermore to the League of Arab States, which is a forum for ministerial decisions, including the social development area, ESCWA brings the necessary link with the global entities and with the global conferences. ESCWA also cooperates closely with UNCTAD on World Trade Organization issues; being part of the region and with a more thorough and focused knowledge, it makes an important contribution to UNCTAD as well as to the relationship between the member States and World Trade Organization.

92. In the area of economic and social development, ESCWA also works closely with civil society institutions, such as Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in Lebanon and the Economic Research Forum for the Middle East, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey, in examining issues of privatization and in advocating useful lessons learned from previous and ongoing experiences. In some of the social areas of concern, it works closely with some of the region's growing number of non-governmental organizations, for instance, the Middle East Committee for the Affairs of the Blind. In recent years, ESCWA has developed a network of relationships with several of the region's premier education and research institutions, such as Cairo University's Institute of Statistical Studies and Research and the National Centre for Social and Criminal Research and Demographic Centre; and Al-Yarmouk University. Establishment of similar relationships of cooperation is envisaged with others, such as Damascus University and Kuwait University.

93. Cooperation with ECE is a good example of ways by which the regional commissions reinforce each other and learn from each other's experiences. Due to the well-established standard-setting function of ECE in the area of transport, ESCWA has joined its relevant mechanisms, such as the United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT). With ESCWA embarking on standard-setting in this particular area of immediate importance in the region, it will be establishing itself also as the forum that develops and adopts region-wide agreements. The League of Arab States holds the annual conference of the Ministers of Transport, but its concerns are more of a political nature. ESCWA is, in effect, the only technical body dealing with transport, as demonstrated by the technical assistance provided to GCC on establishing a subregional database on transport.

94. Close working relationships have been established with the United Nations Statistics Division, UNDP, UNICEF and the Centre for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR), a non-governmental organization in the area of gender statistics. ESCWA is the coordinating body in this area and is recognized for its work in the region. In terms of undertaking activities for implementing the International Comparison Programme (ICP) of prices with the World Bank, ESCWA was the natural partner for the World Bank to select in respect of advocating for the issue among hesitant member States, which eventually found many benefits in joining the ICP project.

95. Water, being a critical issue in the region, is an area where much cooperation is needed among interested bodies. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has been a main supporter of ESCWA in this area, with a clear recognition that ESCWA has the accumulated experience and knowledge for dealing with this important issue. Since ESCWA's work on water promotes the adoption of legal and institutional instruments for management of joint water resources, it has been invited to cooperate with UNESCO and other partners, in convening a meeting on international and comparative law on international waterways.

ESCWA cooperation with other bodies in the field of operational activities

96. ESCWA's operational activities permeates its core functions and impacts on its analytical work, strengthens its relationship with member States and enhances its inputs into joint activities with other United Nations and non-United Nations agencies. Through this work, ESCWA provides advisory services, preparation and management of projects and organization of training activities. In a region that is small and homogenous in many aspects, but that lacks developed economic relations, it is important to create the necessary technical links for strengthening economic relations. Therefore, the technical assistance activities undertaken by ESCWA promote economic cooperation among member States and within the region.

97. With its pool of specialized regional advisers, ESCWA has a core group of varied expertise that can readily provide assistance to member States. More recently, ESCWA has been requested to provide direct technical input into programmes executed by other agencies at the country level. More requests are emanating from UNDP country offices for ESCWA's support to the country programme in areas such as human development, environment, World Trade

Organization agreements, transport and, most of all, statistics. Although regional advisers work at the country level, they place country issues within a regional perspective. Their movement from one country to another brings with it the regional links as well as the relationships with other United Nations agencies that can benefit the member States. Similarly, both field operations and training workshops, which are implemented nationally within a regional project, often require the joint efforts of more than one United Nations agency. Successful outcome and results are shared and transmitted within the organizations of the system.

98. Since ESCWA meets biennially and does not have a Commission session in 1998, its Advisory Committee of Ambassadors met on 30 March 1998 to consider the status and implementation of the reform process of ESCWA. In light of General Assembly resolution 52/12 B and the Economic and Social Council's review of the reform of the commissions in 1998, the meeting considered the report entitled "Programme and organizational changes and modifications made by ESCWA since 1994" (E/ESCWA/19/5), which was presented to the session of the Commission in 1997. The Advisory Committee decided to bring up anew, with the respective Governments of its member countries, the issue of ESCWA's reform. At its reconvened meeting of 21 April 1998, the Advisory Committee reconfirmed the content of Council resolution 1997/14 on ESCWA reform, in which the Council called for the granting to the Commission, within the framework of the reform of the United Nations system, of a broader mandate for carrying out its activities, including those related to regional technical cooperation projects. The Advisory Committee also expressed satisfaction with the continued implementation of reform initiatives of the Commission, and noted that the Commission would review the developments at its next session in 1999.

II. Trends and activities

A. Work of the commissions in normative and operational activities, including follow-up activities to recent global conferences

99. The regional commissions share a common mandate for raising the level of economic development and cooperation among the countries of their respective regions and between them and other parts of the world. As such, their activities are primarily region-specific – tailored to suit the changing requirements of their regional membership. They serve as a forum for articulating regional perspectives on global issues and vice versa. Their analytical work has twofold objectives: to provide information and views on socio-economic developments in the region, and to promote policy debates and exchange of experience in those fields. Their proximity to the member countries has conditioned them to orient their operational activities towards support of those countries' regular activities within a symbiotic relationship of mutual enrichment.

100. At the same time, as part of the institutional structure of the United Nations, the regional commissions carry out the relevant global mandates emanating from the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, which, as reflected in the roles assigned to them, also include follow-up to global conferences. Some significant developments in this respect during the period under review are also touched upon. (For a more detailed account and analytical coverage, see report of the Secretary-General on integrated coordinated implementation and follow-up of major United Nations conferences and summits (E/1998/19)).

1. Economic Commission for Europe

101. The major activities of ECE can be grouped into the following categories: development of common legal instruments, norms and standards; activities relating to policy and analytical issues; coordination, harmonization and development of statistical data; and operational activities.

102. In the area of norms and standards, ECE has continued its work in the development of normative instruments, thereby fostering regional cooperation, facilitating economic integration and promoting policy convergence. For example, in the field of environment, such work aims at solving transboundary problems and promoting the implementation of environmentally sound national policies. In trade, it helps to reduce transaction costs while enlarging the market by reducing technical barriers to trade. In transport, it facilitates the mobility of persons and goods, and improves the security of transport of persons and the environmental performance of transport systems. In statistics, standard principles and concepts contribute to common understanding and promote data reliability and comparability in the region.

103. In the area of environment, under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution, two new protocols have been negotiated: the protocol on heavy metals, which sets emission ceilings and limit values for specified emission sources, as well as requirements for phasing out leaded petrol; and the protocol on persistent organic pollutants

(POPs), either setting limits on their emissions or establishing bans or phase-out timetables. The latter protocol is expected to provide an input to work on a worldwide convention on POPs to start in the summer of 1998. Both of these two new protocols are expected to be adopted and opened for signature at the special session of the Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution at ministerial level in Aarhus (Denmark) on 24 June 1998.

104. Under the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, preparation is under way, in collaboration with WHO's Regional Office for Europe, for a new protocol on the prevention, control and reduction of water-related diseases which will be submitted to the Ministerial Conference on Health and Environment for adoption and signature.

105. A new convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters has been prepared and will be submitted to the fourth Conference "Environment for Europe", in June 1998, for adoption and signature by the countries.

106. In the field of transport, ECE continued to develop and amend international legally binding instruments on a number of transport issues. For example, more than 50 amendments were made to the 104 existing ECE Regulations for the Construction of Vehicles, in order to incorporate new technical developments and new demand for increased safety and environmental protection. The TIR Convention, designed to facilitate international transit traffic of goods, is being revised and the first phase has been completed.

107. The Convention on Customs Treatment of Containers Used in International Transport entered into force in January 1998 following ratification by seven countries and the EU. In addition, a number of agreements were signed and entered into force, namely, an agreement establishing the European network of inland waterways, signed by 14 countries; a new agreement for the adoption of uniform conditions for technical inspections of vehicles, signed by 22 countries; and a protocol establishing uniform infrastructure and performance requirements for combined transport on inland waterways, signed by 12 countries. Furthermore, a new legal instrument concerning the international carriage of dangerous goods by inland waterways (ADN) was under preparation and seven new ECE regulations for the construction of vehicles to be annexed to the 1958 Agreement were prepared and adopted.

108. In the area of trade, 14 new standardized electronic messages have been added (containing information in support of activities in accounting, banking, customs, health care, transportation, sales and social administration) within the framework of UN/EDIFACT, bringing the total number of messages to over 150. Work has also been launched to develop trade facilitation recommendations, in particular on audit-based controls and risk analysis for border clearance. The ECE European Convention on International Commercial Arbitration dating from 1961 and signed by 29 Governments to date will be reviewed. An international meeting is scheduled for September 1998.

109. In the area of agriculture, ECE agricultural quality standards were revised/agreed regarding selected fruits, vegetables and meat products.

110. In the area of energy, ECE has developed a Glossary of National Gas Reserves: Exploration, Exploitation, Economics; and the United Nations Framework Classification for Reserves/Resources: Solid Fuels and Mineral Commodities. The Classification, developed with the support of more than 60 countries from Europe, Asia, Latin America, North America and Africa, and whose endorsement by ECE was welcomed by the Economic and Social Council in July 1997 (Council decision 1997/226), is a universal and internationally applicable scheme that is expected to facilitate the reassessment of available resources/reserves using market-based criteria and to promote, in the context of globalization, projects, particularly in transition and developing countries, with a view to attracting investments for their commercialization. Currently, ECE in cooperation with other regional commissions is taking steps to ensure its worldwide practical application.

111. In statistics, ECE has established, in close collaboration with the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and ECE member countries, a set of detailed recommendations for census taking in the region. These recommendations will support the undertaking of national population and housing censuses in the 2000 round which is well under way in the countries of the region. This set of recommendations has also been adopted by Eurostat on behalf of EU.

112. In terms of policy and analysis, ECE carries out in-depth studies of economic situations in countries of the region, particularly those with economies in transition, which are to be found in the *Economic Survey of Europe*. Following the ECE reform, the *Survey* is now an annual volume of three issues. The first issue of each volume focuses on developments in the ECE region in the past and coming year, with special emphasis on the transition economies and their relations with the rest of the world; it

also deals with selected structural and institutional aspects of the transition process. The second addresses selected topics including other areas of ECE's work. The third focuses on the trade and external financial relations of the transition economies, replacing the *Economic Bulletin for Europe*. In addition, an annual seminar focusing on one selected economic issue is to be organized immediately prior to each annual session of the Commission. The 1998 seminar focused on enterprise and bank restructuring in the transition economies, the outcome of which will be reflected in the second issue of the 1998 *Economic Survey of Europe*.

113. In environment, ECE contributes to policy formulation through the "Environment for Europe" process, the regional promotion of Agenda 21,[9] environmental performance reviews and the development and implementation of regional legally binding instruments. The environmental performance review (EPR) programme produces policy recommendations for individual ECE member countries in transition. Since April 1997, Estonia, Slovenia and the Republic of Moldova have received and implemented EPR recommendations. EPR publications relating to environmental policies and management during the reporting period have covered Slovenia, the Republic of Moldova and Lithuania.

114. In trade, ECE has led the way in studying the impact of norms and standards on the fluidity of international trade and a study is being prepared for a debate on this issue in 1998. A major study was published, in 1997, on structural ownership changes in the chemical industry in countries in transition.

115. In energy, the intergovernmental debates on policy issues are supported by analytical studies, particularly in the fields of energy situation and prospects (with a specific study on Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries), gas (interconnection of networks, ground floor storage, natural gas resources) and energy efficiency (labelling and standards).

116. In the timber sector, a study on markets for certified forest products has been initiated, touching on the highly sensitive issue of certification of sustainably managed forest products. It will be published in the course of 1998.

117. The Committee on Human Settlements has focused on specific policy issues based on best practices and case studies and has published an analysis of human settlements trends in Central and Eastern Europe. In order to obtain advice on the organization of policy debates and exchange of experiences in human settlements issues, the Committee has established an advisory board consisting of experts from the private sector and non-governmental organizations dealing with housing, planning and land administration, and local authorities.

118. Concerning coordination, harmonization and development of statistical data, the 1997 plenary session of the ECE Conference of European Statisticians further strengthened the coordination of statistical activities throughout the region and beyond, mainly through the Integrated Presentation of Programme of Work of about 25 international statistical institutes active in the region including the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Eurostat and all the major global organizations, and the streamlining of statistical data collection.

119. In line with ECE's reform, the database on macroeconomic and other statistics is being consolidated, in order to provide data support to the three issues of the *Economic Survey of Europe* and to other international organizations relying on ECE for this data collection.

120. In the field of timber, ECE is taking the lead in creating the world's primary statistical database on the extent and condition of temperate and boreal forests. With its partner, FAO, it is carrying out the Temperate and Boreal Forest Resource Assessment 2000, for publication in 1999. These data, to be made available as a publication and on the Internet, will be an important input to the analysis of the progress of sustainable forest management in the region, as requested by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. In particular, preliminary results will be submitted to the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe in June 1998.

121. The development, harmonization and coordination of statistical data feature also in a number of other areas of ECE's work, including environment, transport, trade and energy.

122. Operational activities are carried out in support of the regular activities of ECE. The ECE team of regional advisers undertakes advisory missions and provides technical assistance, mainly to countries in transition, in problem identification, project formulation and implementation of specific projects and programmes. ECE also organizes some 40 training workshops, seminars and study tours.

123. Operational activities organized with and for subregional groupings and initiatives have a cost-effective impact as they benefit all countries that are members of these entities. Cooperation with subregional groupings and initiatives also promotes greater awareness and use of instruments developed at intergovernmental level within ECE, and precludes the development by these groupings of

competing/conflicting policies or instruments which would create confusion at governmental level. In the course of 1997, operational activities undertaken in cooperation with, or in the framework of, subregional organizations or initiatives have increased. They are focused on environment, transport and border crossing, sustainable energy, trade facilitation, investment promotion and support to small and medium-sized enterprises.

124. Among the other activities organized by ECE, a number of events are noteworthy:

(a) Ministerial Regional Conference on Transport and the Environment (Vienna, November 1997) which adopted a Declaration outlining a set of commitments for promoting sustainable transport systems in the region, and a Programme of Joint Action, containing a corresponding set of policies and measures to be taken at the national and international levels;

(b) Preparation of the Fourth Pan-European Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", which will take place in Aarhus from 23 to 25 June 1998;

(c) Two peer review meetings, with ministerial participation, each having taken place following the environmental performance reviews undertaken in Slovenia and the Republic of Moldova;

(d) Forum on the Prospects of Promoting Foreign Direct Investments in Transition Economies, organized in cooperation with the World Bank in September 1997 in Geneva;

(e) Preparation of the Ministerial Conference on Protection of Forests in Europe (June 1998), which will review progress in sustainable forest management since the previous Ministerial Conference, in 1993, and set the directions for future international work;

(f) Regional population meeting, to be held in Budapest towards the end of 1998, which will review and appraise the implementation, in the ECE region, of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development[10] and the European Population Conference recommendations.

125. In respect of interregional cooperation, in the field of transport, the ECE secretariat cooperated closely with the ESCAP secretariat in acquainting ESCAP member Governments with the international legal instruments developed by ECE in the field of transport and in assisting those countries in acceding to those legal instruments.

126. In trade facilitation, ECE and ESCAP have continued to develop a computer-based training programme on electronic data interchange (EDI) and UN/EDIFACT. A workshop on Trade Facilitation and UN/EDIFACT was organized in Beirut in collaboration with ESCWA. A mail server has also been set up by ECE to facilitate information-sharing among regional commissions in this area. ESCAP and ESCWA regularly participate in CEFACT meetings, representing their respective region.

127. With respect to follow-up to global conferences, and specifically as a regional follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the participants in a consultative meeting among regional commissions, recently held in New York, endorsed the project of a pilot regional workshop which ECE would hold in the fourth quarter of this year in order to: (a) review all country and EU reports submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development and other relevant document; (b) provide an inventory of best practices and, if appropriate, an assessment; (c) review national priorities and provide analysis as to the extent that national priorities coincide with regional priorities and concur with priorities of the Commission.

128. The results of this pilot project would be submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its seventh session, in 1999, and would be shared with other regional commissions.

129. In line with a recommendation of Agenda 21 addressed to the regional commissions, the ECE organized a Ministerial Conference on Transport and the Environment which took place in November 1997 in Vienna. A Declaration, outlining a set of commitments for promoting sustainable transport systems in the region, and a Programme of Joint Action, containing a corresponding set of policies and measures to be taken at the national and international levels, were adopted and formally signed by 35 ECE member States. In addition, two legally binding agreements on specific areas related to transport and the environment were opened for signature.

130. The Conference has succeeded in showing that reconciling transport and the environment is becoming a political priority. The follow-up mechanisms cover both the national and the regional levels. For the latter, ECE is requested to ensure an overall monitoring of the Programme of Joint Action through joint meetings of the bureaux of the Inland Transport Committee and of the Committee on Environmental Policy, to which representatives of other European and worldwide institutions will be invited.

131. The ECE secretariat undertook an initiative to conduct a survey of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and the implementation

of the Habitat Agenda[11] by member countries. The survey shows that the Agenda is mainly used for awareness-raising and dissemination of information in the countries and that norms, policies and related projects continue without direct reference to the Habitat II process. Actually, ECE develops activities covered by the Agenda but focusing on priority issues for countries in transition, namely, housing reform, land administration, urban renewal and sustainable human settlements development.

132. The most important follow-up decision taken by ECE after Beijing, and which is featured in its reform, was to mainstream the gender perspective in the work programme of its principal subsidiary bodies. Initial intergovernmental discussion have already occurred in the areas of human settlements, environment, trade and timber. Support to gender statistics in ECE countries is already established on a regular basis.

133. An inter-agency meeting among United Nations and non-United Nations organizations actors on gender issues in the region will be convened by ECE by the end of this year in order to start the preparations for the ECE regional input to the five-year global review of the Beijing Conference. In particular, this meeting will be an opportunity to update a matrix established at a similar meeting in 1996, which outlined the main activities of these organizations in the areas of concern identified in both the regional platforms for action and the global Platforms for Action.[12] This proved to be a valuable tool for all the organizations concerned, helping them to secure transparency, build up complementarities and synergies, and identify new possibilities of cooperation.

134. ECE is currently making arrangements to take part in the global quinquennial review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. Preparations are under way to hold a Regional Population Meeting in Budapest, by the end of 1998, in order to review and appraise the implementation, in the ECE region, of the Programme of Action and the European Population Conference recommendations. The meeting will consider all salient population issues and policies since 1993 and adopt a report on the implementation of the Programme of Action and the recommendations. The focus of the meeting, will be on the following themes: (a) low fertility, including its determinants and future prospects; (b) mortality, with special emphasis on the falling and stagnating life expectancy in countries in transition and on old-age mortality throughout the region; and (c) population ageing, including its dynamics and its social and economic implications at the family, community and societal levels.

2. Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

135. The recent financial crisis that has affected several Asian economies has served to slow down the rapid pace of growth characteristic of the Asia-Pacific region in recent decades. The crisis has accentuated the need for closer cooperation among the region's economies in the face of the challenges posed by globalization, as well as the need for greater assistance to be rendered to the more vulnerable groups of countries and weaker segments of societies within countries.

136. The ESCAP secretariat has been mindful of the differences in the levels of development among the members and associate members of the Commission, and has continued to play a catalytic role through a mix of analytical and operational activities in spreading the growth momentum, to ensure that growth occurs in a sustainable manner, and that wealth is more equitably distributed so as to improve the quality of life of some 830 million of the region's poor.

137. The *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific, 1997*,[13] for instance, examines the opportunities and challenges that the ESCAP region faces as it approaches the twenty-first century in the face of the intensifying processes of globalization and regionalization. Many of the factors driving these processes are beyond the control of individual developing countries. The key policy question is how to optimize the benefits of their participation in these processes. The benefits and risks of integration into the international and regional economy, focusing on foreign trade and external finance including foreign direct investment (FDI), are analysed in the *Survey*. It also examines the policy perspectives for promoting growth with equity in the context of emerging developments.

138. In the area of regional economic cooperation in the wake of the recent financial crisis, a High-level Seminar on Managing Capital Flows: National and International Action will be held in Bangkok in June 1998, jointly organized by ESCAP, the World Bank, IMF and the Asian Development Bank. Other analytical work undertaken by ESCAP has involved monitoring, review and assessment of macroeconomic issues, trends and policies at the regional and subregional levels, and analysis of challenges and opportunities in the economic and social sectors arising from globalization and liberalization. In operational terms, ESCAP has provided technical assistance to the Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) initiative by formulating a programme for the development of cooperation in the priority sectors of trade,

investment and industry, technology, infrastructure and transport, tourism, energy, agriculture and human resources development. Another important initiative was the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), which is being formulated jointly by ESCAP and ECE and seeks to facilitate the economic integration of the countries of Central Asia into both Europe and Asia as well as to promote cooperation among those countries. The Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan signed the joint Declaration on SPECA in March 1998. With ECA, ESCAP is seeking to promote interregional cooperation in the areas of trade and investment.

139. ESCAP has provided technical assistance to the members and associate members in the important areas of investment promotion, especially in the least developed countries, promotion of technology flows, industrial complementarities and relocation of industries, promotion of environmentally sound technologies, and technical and industrial skills development. ESCAP organized the Meeting of Ministers of Industry and Technology in Bangkok in February 1998, which adopted a Ministerial Declaration and a regional action plan emphasizing the need for further cooperation and indicating priority areas of action for strengthening regional cooperation in future.

140. In the area of poverty alleviation, ESCAP undertook both analytical and operational activities, the latter through provision of direct technical assistance and advisory services covering the following fields: growth strategies and structural reforms; human resources development; social development; population issues; rural development; human settlements; women in development; and industry and technology. In collaboration with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and UNDP, a project entitled "SAARC Seven Sisters: district development coordination and improved poverty project design" was implemented. Operational support in the form of a series of technical assistance activities were undertaken to support initiatives to attain the goals and targets of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region and the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, as well as to promote the aims and objectives of General Assembly resolution 50/141 on the International Year of Older Persons: towards a society for all ages.

141. Given the growing recognition in the region of the importance of transport and communication linkages in promoting the flow of goods and services, ESCAP has continued to promote accession by member countries to international land transport facilitation conventions. Technical assistance was provided to subregional organizations: ASEAN in the areas of multimodal transport development and transport of dangerous goods; ECO in international transport development; and SAARC in the improvement of subregional transport systems and facilitation measures.

142. ESCAP's institutional structure in the field of statistics was strengthened through the retention of the Committee on Statistics and agreement on terms of reference for its Bureau. With regard to harmonization, coordination and development of statistical data, emphasis has been placed on coordination with regional and international statistical agencies, mainly through the ACC machinery and the ESCAP Committee on Statistics. Initiatives were undertaken to collaborate with UNFPA on population statistics, the World Bank on ICP, the Asian Development Bank on environment statistics and national accounts, and IMF on data dissemination standards, which assumed growing importance in the wake of the Asian financial crisis. The Committee's Working Group of Statistical Experts also drew attention to the Year 2000 (Y2K) problem in computers, which threatens to disrupt not only statistical operations but also the activities of many public sector organizations. Most countries in the region appear ill-prepared to tackle the issue.

143. In close coordination with ECE, the secretariat is planning to conduct a joint seminar on the United Nations Framework Classification for Reserves/Resources: Solid Fuels and Mineral Commodities, for the countries of the Asia and Pacific region, subject to the availability of funding.

144. With respect to follow-up activities to recent global conferences, ESCAP, as mandated by the General Assembly, has actively sought to pursue recommendations for action at the regional level arising from decisions adopted at recent global conferences. It is expected that this role will be continued and further reinforced in the months to come.

145. The Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development, held at Manila in November 1997, reviewed the progress in the implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, in the context of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.[14] The Conference adopted the Manila Declaration on Accelerated Implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region, which contained recommendations for achieving the interrelated goals of eradicating poverty, expansion of employment and enhancement of social integration. In implementing ESCAP's social development programmes and activities, particular emphasis has been placed on an integrated approach as well as on strengthening the role of non-governmental organizations and civil society.

146. Population issues continue to be of central concern to countries of the region. Through its research and advocacy role, ESCAP has sought to increase awareness of the internationally agreed paradigm shift and new directions in population policy formulation and programme implementation as a result of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. ESCAP has provided training and advisory services to member countries in order to support implementation of the Bali Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development adopted by the Fourth Asian and Pacific Population Conference held in 1992, and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. A High-Level Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Bali Declaration on Population and Sustainable Development was held at Bangkok in March 1998. ESCAP also rendered technical support to member countries in the development of national plans of action on the adaptation of existing plans to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995.

147. Significant progress has been made in the region in implementing Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, including the development of a framework for the North-East Asian Subregional Programme of Environmental Cooperation, aimed at promoting technical cooperation and information exchanges on environmental issues of particular concern to China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. ESCAP formulated a regional networking mechanism for regional cooperation in the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.[15] Through this mechanism and in collaboration with the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, a review of issues relating to climate change and potential rise in sea level was conducted. The outcome of that review was submitted to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, at its third session, held at Kyoto, Japan, in December 1997.

148. ESCAP has also started preparation for the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific in the year 2000. Under the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States,[16] the fourth session of the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries was held by ESCAP in April 1997, in cooperation with the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP). That session focused on issues of trade and investment affecting the prospects of these vulnerable countries in the Pacific.

149. Both economic and population growth in recent years have put pressure on the natural resources in the region, often leading to unsustainable methods of usage and exploitation. Growing concern over environmental degradation has led ESCAP to promote national efforts in establishing sustainable policies for natural resources development and management. For example, several meetings were held to consider the issues and options relating to energy infrastructure policies and pricing, the use of clean coal technologies and policies that encourage sustainable energy development, such as energy efficiency and fuel switching. ESCAP has also been actively promoting the development of a regional strategic approach to freshwater resources, which have become a major area of concern.

3. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

150. The activities carried out by ECLAC since the last report, took place in a context of moderate economic recovery and adaptation of the regional economies to relevant trends and events taking place in the world economy. Within this context, ECLAC collaborated with member States in the comprehensive analysis of development, assisting in the design, monitoring and evaluation of public polices, and providing the resulting relevant operational services in the fields of specialized information, technical assistance, training and support for regional and international cooperation.

151. Consolidating its role as one of the most important sources of information on macroeconomic and social trends in the countries of the region, ECLAC achieved during this period important progress in timely issuance of one of its main publications, *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean*. The inclusion of the most up-to-date information in the *Survey* makes it one of the most useful and sought-after publications by both policy makers and economic agents in the region and in the rest of the world.

152. Coming out with the *Survey* in the fourth quarter with preliminary information on the first eight months of the year for every country in the region has made it possible to phase out the *Economic Panorama* which used to be published in September, as an advance, with preliminary information on the first semester for only 10 countries. This resulted in important savings in resources.

153. ECLAC also published the *Preliminary Overview of the Economy of Latin America and the Caribbean 1997*,[17]

which included information on the repercussions of the Asian crisis in the region and on the impact of the meteorological phenomena know as El Niño on the economic activity; the *Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean 1997*,[18] published in February 1998, presenting a selection, updated to the end of December, of the main statistical series on economic and social trends in the countries of the region; and the *Social Panorama of Latin America 1997*,[19] presenting the most relevant aspects of the social evolution in the region, particularly those associated with the social equity dimension.

154. In August 1997, the new version of ECLAC's Internet site was launched, featuring a more user-friendly design and a complete new content structure, which includes the most important reports, as well as details of conferences, seminars and research projects.

155. In terms of analytical activities, the secretariat continued carrying out programme-focused and multidisciplinary works, applying its comprehensive approach to the study of the choices and factors that determine the economic and social development of the countries in the region. In doing so, ECLAC has paid particular attention to emerging issues in the world and the efforts deployed by the regional economies to adapt to them. In the area of development financing, for example, in addition to the study of issues and policies that have simultaneous social and financial/economic implications, such as reforms in the pension and health provision systems, the secretariat has dwelled on the macroeconomic impact of international capital flows in developing economies.

156. In January 1998, ECLAC, jointly with OECD, published a study on large flows of capital into the region since 1990, and on policy guidelines as to how developing countries can secure greater benefits from such capital inflows without increasing the risks for crisis. Addressing the need for a comprehensive assessment of the reforms in public finances carried out in the region since the beginning of the decade and with the intention of providing member States with a forum for discussing policy guidelines, the secretariat proposed that the substantive debates of the Commission's twenty-seventh session (Aruba, 11-16 May 1998) be devoted to this matter. As a consequence, the main document submitted to the session, entitled *The Fiscal Covenant: Strengths, Weaknesses, Challenges*, dealt with fiscal administration public finance and its relationship with political institutions.

157. The secretariat continued to undertake analysis of the industrial restructuring process and the design of policies to enhance the competitiveness of countries in the region. This included in-depth studies of the impact of economic liberalization on the manufacturing sector at large as well as on some other sectors; the restructuring experiences of some strategic sectors; and the development potential for natural resource-based clusters. As a result of ECLAC's efforts to reach all relevant social actors in the region, technical assistance activities were carried out for promoting innovation and competitiveness in the Latin America and Caribbean business sector.

158. In the area of social development, the secretariat paid special attention to policies for overcoming the prevailing conditions of poverty and social inequity presented within the context of moderate economic recovery experienced by the countries of the region. This entailed analysis leading to important modifications in social policies, acknowledging the limits facing the State in carrying out, on its own, the necessary improvements in programme delivery, and encouraging the participation of civil society in the financing and execution of social programmes. As part of its effort to address important emerging issues, ECLAC began a research programme aimed at assisting policy formulation in the fight against the use of illicit drugs.

159. In the area of regional integration and cooperation, ECLAC continued assisting Governments in the analysis of conceptual as well as practical issues arising from the regional integration process under way in the region. The activities in this area, which were not limited to commercial issues, included the analysis of infrastructure issues, particularly transportation and energy, as well as the social and institutional dimensions of regional integration.

160. In cooperation with the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), ECLAC continued its assistance to Governments in the implementation of the new hemispheric agenda resulting from the integration dynamic within the framework of the Americas Summit. The Commission has been particularly active in the working groups dealing with competition, services and access to markets by smaller economies. At the request of the Central American Governments, ECLAC prepared a proposal for adapting the subregional institutional capacity to the present and future challenges of the integration process. This proposal was the basis for the Panama II Declaration of the Central American Head of States, of July 1997.

161. ECLAC continued to undertake activities dealing with the interface aspects of regional integration and international cooperation. ECLAC produced the second edition of *Panorama de la inserción internacional* which included analysis of global trends affecting the integration of Latin

America and the Caribbean in the world economy and evolution of the regional integration process.

162. The publication of several books produced by the secretariat by two prestigious publishing houses demonstrates the relevance of ECLAC's work and the demand for the Commission's products among the public at large. With the intention of achieving further improvements in the services provided to the region, ECLAC commissioned at the beginning of 1998 an external evaluation for its publications programme, on the basis of which a new strategy will be implemented.

163. In addition to the training elements of most of ECLAC's technical assistance activities, formal training activities were provided through five international courses organized by the Latin America and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES) in local and regional development, public policy reform, public administration and project management, benefiting 140 professionals from the region and other developing regions.

164. With respect to follow-up to global conferences, ECLAC convened the First Regional Conference in Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development (6-9 April, São Paulo, Brazil). The main conference report, entitled *The Equity Gap: Latin America, the Caribbean and the Social Summit*,[20] analysed existing conditions of poverty, employment and social integration, and proposed additional guidelines on policies designed to facilitate the full realization of the Summit commitments. With the adoption of a document entitled "The São Paulo Consensus", the Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean renewed their commitment to move forward in the realization of the objectives agreed on at the Summit.

165. At ECLAC's twenty-sixth session, its Sessional Ad Hoc Committee on Population and Development reviewed progress achieved in the implementation of the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Plan of Action on Population and Development, adopted in pursuance of the International Conference on Population and Development. ECLAC/CELADE reviewed recent socio-demographic trends and developments in the region; population policies; and regional and subregional activities carried out in the sphere of the Regional Plan. The focus of the Committee at its meeting in May 1998 was on reproductive health and poverty.

166. ECLAC's follow-up activities to the Beijing Conference are aimed at the implementation both of the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001 and of the Platform for Action. The activities of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean were reinforced. At the seventh session of the Regional Conference (19-21 November 1997, Santiago, Chile), delegates adopted the "Consensus of Santiago" which outlines measures aimed at increasing gender equality over the next three years.

167. ECLAC organized a Caribbean Ministerial Meeting on the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (Barbados, 10-14 November 1997). At this meeting, representatives of 22 States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations agreed on priority actions and stressed the need for a properly constituted coordinating mechanism. Member Governments requested the ECLAC and Caribbean Community (CARICOM) secretariats to act as interim secretariat and to establish an inter-agency group to support it.

4. Economic Commission for Africa

168. ECA completed its transition to a new programme structure of five subprogrammes, accelerated the decentralization of activities and staff deployment to its subregional development centres (SRDCs) and launched its new intergovernmental structure during the period under review. The first of the new bodies in the Commission's intergovernmental machinery to be convened was the Ministerial Follow-up Committee of the Conference of Ministers responsible for economic and social development and planning which held its first meeting on 23 and 24 April 1998. The main item in its agenda was the report prepared by the secretariat of the Commission pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/12B on the reform of the United Nations.

169. Promoting the utilization of appropriate scientific and technological techniques so as to facilitate agricultural and environmental transition in Africa is a major priority in ECA's work programme. To this end, ECA hosted the meeting of an ad hoc group of experts on science and technology for food security and sustainable development. This meeting articulated critical science and technology issues facing the region and launched ECA's science and technology network for Africa.

170. ECA organized two national workshops on promotion of informal sector development in Ethiopia and Zambia, as part of a broader effort in the development of developing various aspects of the private sector in Africa. These workshops brought together the various stakeholders, so as to foster partnership between informal sector operators and

government officials. A major study on reconciling indigenous informal and formal micro-financing systems and practice in Africa was undertaken. This study covered the following African countries: Cameroon, Egypt, Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Togo, Uganda and Zambia. An African Centre for Civil Society (ACCS) was established at ECA in 1997. The Centre will promote popular participation and strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) in Africa; serve as a repository of relevant and timely information, both from within and outside Africa on issues related to civil society in development and governance; facilitate effective and programme-based linkages between African CSOs and the international development community; and help African CSOs establish networks at regional and subregional levels.

171. ECA's work in the area of harnessing information for development included the publication of the African statistical yearbook; compendium of intra-African trade-related foreign statistics, 1997; a technical report on best practices in the formulation of statistical development plans; and a Directory of the Committee on African Statistical Development Internet Communications. As part of the implementation of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), ECA convened the first meeting of the African Technical Advisory Committee on AISI, and participated in the meeting of Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa.

172. Various activities aimed at facilitating and enhancing the process of regional integration were undertaken. In particular, ECA conducted a critical review of what has been achieved in furthering the objectives of the programme for the second United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa (UNTACDA II). In addition, ECA organized the eleventh meeting of the Conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications in Cairo, Egypt in November 1997. The Conference adopted a resolution that called on member States to coordinate their actions in order to implement realistic transport policies; and harmonize conditions of competition among different transport modes.

173. ECA also organized the second meeting of the Regional Conference of African Ministers responsible for the development and utilization of minerals and energy resources in Durban, South Africa. A major outcome of the Conference was the Durban Declaration which embodied commitments by member States to promote mineral and mineral development strategies through enhanced cooperation among member States.

174. The subregional development centres of ECA, located in the five subregions of the continent, intensified efforts in providing technical support to and cooperating with the regional economic communities; facilitating networking and information exchange between Governments, civil society and private sector; and strengthening ECA's outreach in the subregions.

175. In support of the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa (UN-SIA), ECA focused mainly on the following five priority areas: education, health, governance, population and information technology. In the area of harnessing information technology for development (HITD), ECA prepared training modules for planners and decision makers on the importance of AISI; developed case studies of best-policy practices providing an enabling environment for development information and communication infrastructure; and participated in the symposium on the HITD/AISI for Global Knowledge Conference. ECA co-organized with the World Bank a global connectivity conference to build capacities of African members States to plan and negotiate new connectivity technologies. ECA and UNDP, under the United Nations Special Initiative, have a mandate to lead consultations on governance reform, coordinate programmes for implementation and mobilize resources and political support for good governance. They both co-sponsored the first Africa governance forum held in July 1997. Under the joint leadership of the World Bank, UNESCO and ECA, the United Nations Special Initiative has demonstrated substantial progress in the education sector. A high-level meeting convened by UNESCO discussed the Mozambique Education Sector Strategy. The ECA/United Nations Special Initiative secretariat team convened a consultation meeting on the problem of redressing the image of Africa, a key focus of the Communication Strategy for Africa. ECA has reinforced its collaborative arrangements with WHO in the context of its new strategic directions and of the United Nations Special Initiative. In this connection, an ECA/WHO joint project on the role of local government in health is being prepared.

176. Within the context of follow-up to global conferences, ECA put great emphasis on the economic and social empowerment of women in Africa. ECA undertook measures to increase women's awareness of international and national human rights instruments to enable them defend their rights and to disseminate information on progress made on the situation of women in the critical areas of the global and African platforms for action. In pursuance of these objectives, ECA conducted six national surveys in the Eastern and Western African subregions to assess the level of women's awareness of their human and legal rights and the extent to which they enjoyed them. Subsequently, a seminar was held in Lusaka, Zambia, in April 1998, which

brought together non-governmental organizations and government representatives from East Africa who are working in the area of human rights to devise concrete strategies for partnerships to increase women's access to legal services.

177. ECA organized two subregional meetings, for West Africa in November 1997 and Central Africa in May 1998, to review progress in the implementation of the global and regional platforms for action as part of follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. Several major publications were issued to promote information on gender issues. These included publications on strategies for promoting legal literacy in Africa; strategies for promoting a favourable legal environment for women's access to productive resources; national government and selected non-governmental organization machineries on women in Africa; roster of African women experts; guidelines for preparing national reports on the implementation of the platforms for action; and traditional and cultural practices harmful to the girl child. As a significant and symbolic commitment to the advancement of women in Africa, at the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the Commission on the Status of Women, in April 1998, ECA organized an international conference on the theme "African women and economic development: investing in our future". The Conference brought together about 500 senior policy makers from Governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society, and subregional, regional and international organizations as well as some heads of State of African countries.

178. ECA has integrated the International Conference on Population and Development goals into its target areas of food, population and environment. ECA, together with UNDP, will be collaborating on specific United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and International Conference on Population and Development activities which will include joint studies, organization of policy seminars and workshops, and advocacy of environmentally sound development.

179. As an integral part of the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, ECA will be publishing a status report on poverty annually, and will convene a regional meeting as a follow-up to the Summit in Kenya in October 1998.

5. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

180. The principal priorities fostered by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) continued to guide its main function of promoting regional development and cooperation. Thus, undertaking analytical studies in priority areas of global and regional concerns, including advancing the harmonization of norms, standards and legislative instruments in both the economic and social fields, formed the main thrust of ESCWA's work. Another main priority consisted of promoting integrated policies and strategies among ESCWA member States with regard to sectoral issues of regional significance as well as global issues with regional implications. Over and above the publication of economic and social statistics, the harmonization of statistical data and the promotion of international statistical standards at the regional level were a third priority area in the work of ESCWA. A fourth priority consisted in establishing complementarity between normative and analytical activities on the one hand, and operational activities on the other, whereby field projects, training courses and advisory services would present the operational dimension of normative activities and gave them further credence. These priorities were mainly served through a critical mass of activities launched during the biennium 1994-1995, when ESCWA witnessed major reform in the orientation of its programme of work, and continued through the bienniums 1996-1997 and 1998-1999 in an attempt to create cumulative impact through a series of interrelated multidimensional activities planned to be implemented in phases.

181. Thus, major analytical studies continued to address clusters of priority issues such as poverty, issues emanating from follow-up to the recommendations of global conferences, the impact of world economic arrangements and that of major regional developments, chiefly the peace process, and transport-related issues. Major developments in the region's economic and social arena were analysed through the *Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the ESCWA Region* for the year 1996-1997,[21] which is a main multidisciplinary analytical activity undertaken by ESCWA. In conjunction with the *Survey*, a preliminary overview of socio-economic developments in the region for 1997-1998 was published. This was first introduced in 1996. The preliminary overview provides, in summary form, an early assessment of the socio-economic developments in the region and is aimed at assisting the policy makers by providing them with timely information and analysis. ESCWA is the only organization in the region that provides such a forecast.

182. The harmonization of norms, standards and legislative instruments in various sectors figured prominently in ESCWA's work during the past year. This is expected to be more pronounced in activities planned for the biennium 1998-1999, given that harmonization of norms is in the title

of one of the five thematic subprogrammes carried out by ESCWA. The subprogramme tackles coordination of norms and regulations in the sectors of industry, technology, transport and agriculture. In the area of transport, for example, which is not covered by any specialized United Nations agency, ESCWA had a major share of such activities since it provided regional guidelines for transport agreements and conventions, assessed intra- and interregional transport and infrastructure, and formulated policy and project proposals for the development of a multimodal transport system in the region. In 1998-1999, such activities will be augmented and discussed at an intergovernmental meeting on transport facilitation across borders. In the coming year, harmonization in the transport sector will transcend the regional dimension since it will attempt to address the application of UN/EDIFACT in ESCWA member States. The establishment of a committee on transport in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, through ESCWA resolution 213 (XIX) of 7 May 1997, reflects the importance of transport-related issues to ESCWA member States.

183. One of the chief examples of ESCWA's role in bridging global and national concerns and in promoting streamlined regional policies and strategies is reflected in the initiative that it took to launch a flagship project on integrated follow-up to global conferences at the regional level, which touches on all major issues addressed under ESCWA's subprogramme "Improvement of the quality of life". The project was presented to the Regional Inter-agency Coordination Group in Amman for consideration by concerned United Nations organizations, chiefly UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNIFEM. The project identifies cross-cutting issues in all recent United Nations world conferences and is predicated on the performance of ongoing activities of each agency in this regard and on a holistic approach that provides a comprehensive, multidisciplinary inter-agency framework for follow-up action. Follow-up to global conferences was institutionalized in ESCWA's programme of work for the biennium 1998-1999 through four regional preparatory meetings for the intergovernmental Arab conference on integrated follow-up to global conferences.

184. Another major multidisciplinary activity undertaken by ESCWA in relation to policy setting and analysis was the convening of a meeting entitled "Improving the standard of living in the Arab Mashreq countries" (November 1997), which constituted the second phase of a series of activities on eradicating poverty, initiated in 1994 through studies aimed at analysing the dimension and characteristics of poverty. These activities are expected to culminate towards the end of the current biennium, in the identification of major poverty indicators and policy measures for poverty eradication. ESCWA has already taken a stride in this direction through the execution of two field projects including a community development project in Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as a series of training courses in several ESCWA countries on launching of small and medium-sized enterprises, as practical mechanisms for eradicating poverty. A workshop on simulation exercises and learning labs, which drew on experience accrued in this area and explored modalities for improving and adapting training material, was also held (December 1997). Furthermore, to support networking in the area of poverty and other social development issues, an integrated information system on social policies and measures in the area of human development, gender, population and human settlements is being developed. In this respect, the normative and operational aspects of the poverty-related issues are being undertaken in a mutually supportive fashion.

185. Another major cluster of multidisciplinary analytical activities undertaken by ESCWA relates to the implications of the peace process on selected sectors and regional developments. A study and a meeting on the subject analysed changes that had already taken place in the industrial sector of selected ESCWA countries and attempted to assess future potentials resulting from a situation of progress towards peace. Opportunities and hazards involved in two industries, textiles and electronics, were also discussed. Activities under the umbrella of the implications of peace on the region will be complemented during the biennium 1998-1999 by activities in other areas addressing development of capital markets in ESCWA member countries' industrial sector; and cooperation in the agricultural sector of ESCWA countries in light of the peace process. In undertaking these studies, ESCWA is addressing a major regional development issue which it is best equipped to tackle owing to its proximity to the region and its multidisciplinary mandates.

186. ESCWA continues to undertake activities for the coordination, harmonization and development of statistical data. Apart from ongoing training activities to promote the use of international statistical standards and norms in the region, such as ICP, the new System of National Accounts (1993 SNA),[22] and population and housing censuses, ESCWA launched, in 1997, an integrated statistical information system which includes an assessment of the status of statistics in ESCWA member countries. The first stage of this system involves organization and storage of statistical data in a centralized database which would permit a unified and sophisticated analysis of data generated for the

ESCWA member countries and other Arab countries. Eventually, this database would be made available, in multiple classifications, to outside end-users, thus providing a timely and detailed source of statistical information on the Arab countries, an activity not being undertaken by any other organization in the region.

187. In its resolution 214 (XIX), dated 7 May 1997, the Commission established the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade and Economic Globalization. This resolution reflects the emphasis put by ESCWA member States on the role of the Commission in addressing economic globalization issues and in providing a forum for policy debate of these issues. Recent activities included an expert group meeting on challenges and opportunities of the new international trade agreement (Uruguay Round) and post-Uruguay preparations and adjustments in selected sectors (November 1997). The primary aim of the meeting was to raise awareness in the region concerning the implications of the World Trade Organization on the future of trade in oil and oil-related industries in the region. Furthermore, in April 1998, ESCWA together with UNDP and UNCTAD, and with the participation of the League of Arab States, organized a meeting for ministers and senior Arab officials dealing with World Trade Organization issues within the framework of UNCTAD's technical assistance activities on challenges of integration of Arab countries into the multilateral trading system. The meeting provided a regional forum for discussion of issues related to World Trade Organization agreements, for sensitizing decision makers to the implications of the agreements for Arab countries, and for formulating initiatives for the consideration at the second World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference convened in May 1998 in Geneva. The critical mass of World Trade Organization-related activities are to be further pursued in 1998-1999 by exploring other aspects of the World Trade Organization agreements, namely, the impact of World Trade Organization Environment Committee decisions on trade in ESCWA member States and on intellectual property rights and services.

188. Another testimony of the importance of ESCWA as a regional forum for interaction and for policy formulation was the Commission's decision at its nineteenth session to convene the Committee on Water Resources annually instead of biennially (ESCWA resolution 212 (XIX), dated 7 May 1998). This was attributable to the significance of the issue of water in a region afflicted with water scarcity and to the fact that ESCWA is the sole institution in the region that deals with water-related issues in a comprehensive multidisciplinary manner. Within the framework of strengthening regional cooperation in the area of water, ESCWA undertook a study on transboundary water resources in the ESCWA region: utilization, management and cooperation, which reviewed literature pertaining to ongoing and future plans to develop, manage and conserve water resources at the national, subregional and regional levels. The study also recommended guidelines and strategies for development and management of transboundary water resources. Another area covered was the development of non-conventional water resources and appropriate technologies for groundwater management in the ESCWA region, which involved an operational aspect of water management. Water pollution in urban areas in selected ESCWA countries was the subject of another study which took environmental concerns into consideration. Furthermore, as an operational arm of analytical activities on water-related issues, ESCWA is providing its member States with advisory services on a spectrum of activities and projects in this area. In recognition of the importance of such activities for the region, both France and Germany have made substantial contributions to support these operational projects.

189. ESCWA adopted follow-up to global conferences as the theme of the first meeting of the ESCWA Committee on Social Development (the intergovernmental specialized body) which was held in Amman, in March 1997. In addition, ESCWA was specifically asked by the League of Arab States and the Government of Jordan to participate as a member in the Steering Committee responsible for preparing the meeting of the Ministers of Social Affairs as a follow-up to Beijing.

190. Another major undertaking for ESCWA in the follow-up to world conferences relates to the area of statistics. The Commission is currently cooperating with its member States on the collection of statistical data required for identifying indicators for use in monitoring the implementation of recommendations emanating from world conferences.

191. The umbrella flagship project referred to above reflects ESCWA's efforts to translate global concerns and commitments emanating from recent global conferences into concrete concerted regional policies, programmes and activities, thus assisting in forging a regional perspective that bridges the gap between action at the national level and requirements at the global level. It also reflects ESCWA's efforts towards effective partnership with other United Nations agencies, especially those with operational mandates, such as UNDP, which mainly operates at the national level, and organizations with regional mandates mentioned above. It further reflects fruitful collaborative efforts between ESCWA and other non-United Nations

regional organizations, namely the League of Arab States. Both the League and ESCWA have cooperated in the past by holding regional preparatory meetings in preparation for participation in world conferences, and by promoting common regional positions. It is further expected that ESCWA and the League will jointly implement some of the activities identified in this project, which comprises both normative and operational activities that seek to identify mechanisms for monitoring follow-up action.

B. Interregional cooperation

192. Interregional cooperation has been a relatively ignored dimension of multilateral cooperation under the United Nations. However, its potential is now beginning to be better appreciated. Not that efforts were not made; however, those were mostly sporadic and isolated: they often faltered for lack of sustained interest or for want of funding support.[23] Cooperation was mostly limited to interactions between the secretariats of the regional commissions to learn from each other but, rarely, to pursue projects of mutual interest for any extended time (for example, please see E/1997/40, para. 212). Globalization, however, is reviving the interest in interregional cooperation. Countries are having to deal with problems of an unprecedented scope and complexity, and are required to look beyond national and regional boundaries and experiences. The renewed interest of member States in strengthening interregional cooperation calls for more in-depth reflection and policy guidance by the Economic and Social Council.

193. In one of their periodic meetings, held at Headquarters in New York from 10 to 12 March 1998, the executive secretaries of the regional commissions reviewed the developments taking place at the regional and global levels. They agreed that there are now more possibilities for effective interregional cooperation in view of the emerging interests of their respective membership in learning from experiences in other regions on economic and social issues, and in utilizing the regional commissions for that purpose. They identified some of the issues on which there seemed to be growing interest for interregional cooperation, such as the implication of the current Asian financial crisis; the aftermath of the Mexican financial crisis of 1994; management of financial flows; the relative experience of the integration groupings in promoting intraregional trade and investment; electronic commerce and trade facilitation in a globalizing world economy; privatization of public utilities; reform of the pension system; and intraregional and international migration flows. The General Assembly had in the past taken initiatives to sponsor programmes for transport and communication decades for Asia and the Pacific which also covered the regions of Western Asia,[24] and for Africa.[25] The growing demands being made on the transport and communications systems by an ever-increasing volume of trade and flow of services call for reflections on whether these initiatives should be followed through so as to establish more effective interregional linkages covering those regions as well as extending to others.

194. Some of the initiatives for interregional cooperation would inevitably bring into consideration the adoption of international standards and norms, from which there is much to gain. The regional commissions have gained considerable experience in this area and can, as in the case of ECE, facilitate the dissemination of norms and standards outside a particular region.[26]

195. A recent and concrete example of the need for interregional cooperation is illustrated by the wish of member States of the United Nations and ECE and ESCAP to establish fruitful interregional linkages while also strengthening the regional integration process, as manifested in the adoption on 26 March 1998 of the Tashkent Declaration on the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) (A/53/96, of 14 April 1998, annex II). The meeting which adopted the SPECA programme was attended by the heads of the States of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Executive Secretaries of ECE and ESCAP, who participated by special invitation. The avowed objective of the programme is to support the Central Asian States in developing their cooperation, and creating incentives for economic development and integration into the economies both of Europe and Asia. Implementation of the programme will also closely involve, in addition to ECE and ESCAP, the United Nations resident coordinators in the concerned countries (A/53/96, annex II).

196. Interest has also been expressed by East European countries with respect to learning from the evolving democratization process in Latin America and its implications for economic and social policy-making. Areas of particular interest include the Latin American experiences in the privatization of social security and reform of their health-care management.

197. In terms of more concrete development, ESCAP, ECLAC and ECA have recently submitted two joint projects for funding by UNDP's Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC) programme concerning the development of interregional cooperation and involving Asia and Latin America on the one hand and Asia and Africa on the other. UNDP has, in principle, agreed to support the projects.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 16* (E/1997/36), annex III.
[2] Ibid., annex IV.
[3] Ibid., *Supplement No. 18* (E/1997/38), chap. IV, resolution 53/1.
[4] Ibid.; and E/ESCAP/1080.
[5] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 20* (E/1998/40); and E/ESCAP/1117.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Recent examples of this type of work can be found in the documents the secretariat presented to the twenty-seventh session of ECLAC, held in Aruba from 11 to 16 May 1998. See "The fiscal pact" (LC/G.2024) and "The impact of the Asian financial crisis in Latin America" (LC/G.2026).
[8] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 17* (E/1996/37), Chap. III, sect. F, resolution 553 (XXVI).
[9] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.
[10] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95 XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.
[11] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.IV.6), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.
[12] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.3), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.
[13] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.II.F.8.
[14] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.
[15] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.
[16] *Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 25 April-6 May 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.
[17] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.II.G.13.
[18] United Nations publication, Sales No. E/S.98.II.G.1.
[19] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.II.G.3.
[20] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.II.G.11.
[21] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.97.II.L.5.
[22] *System of National Accounts, 1993* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.XVII.4).
[23] For instance, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 1989/118 of 28 July 1989 on interregional cooperation for facilitation of international trade in the implementation of which it sought to involve the regional commissions and UNCTAD, with funding support from UNDP.
[24] See General Assembly resolution 39/227 of 18 December 1984. In Paragraph 2 of that resolution, the Assembly also included the ESCWA region.
[25] See General Assembly resolutions 33/197 of 29 January 1979 and 43/179 of 20 December 1988.
[26] See discussion on the subject in document E/1997/40, paras. 212-216).